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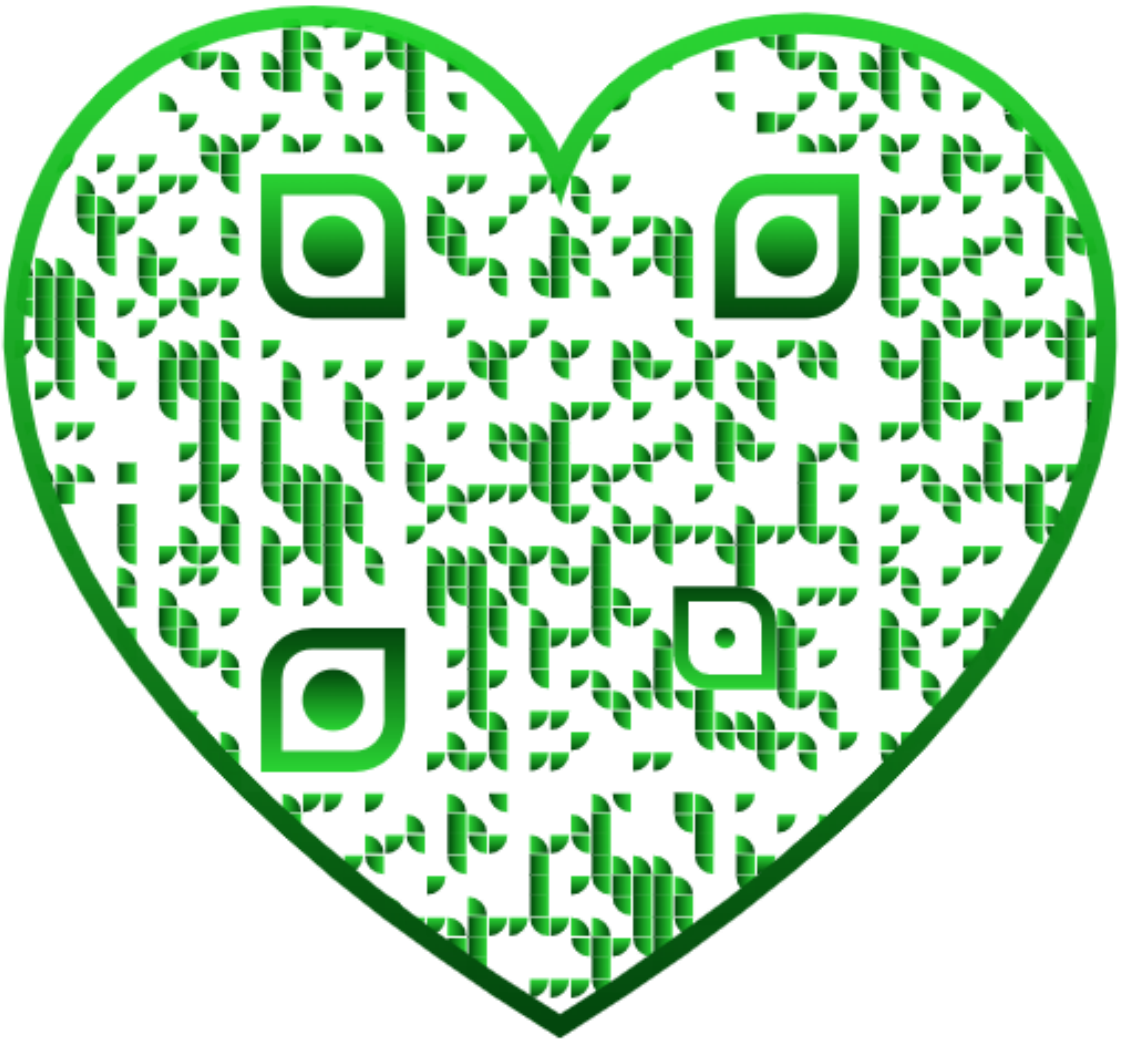
SPRING 2024

MAYNARD JAMES KEENAN

IN CONVERSATION WITH LES CLAYPOOL



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KERRY KING

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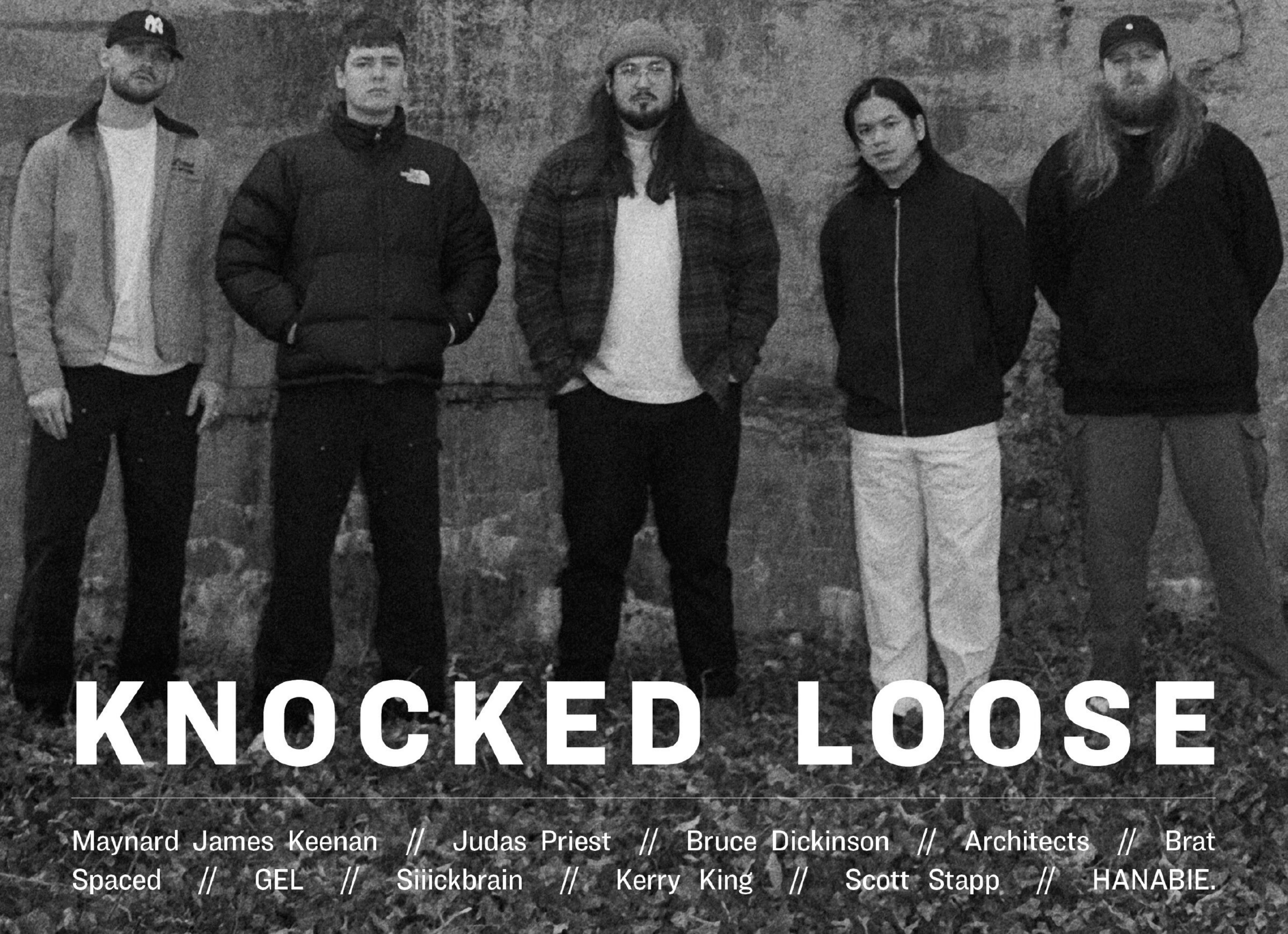

KNOCKED LOOSE

Maynard James Keenan // Judas Priest // Bruce Dickinson // Architects // Brat // Spaced // GEL // Siiickbrain // Kerry King // Scott Stapp // HANABIE.

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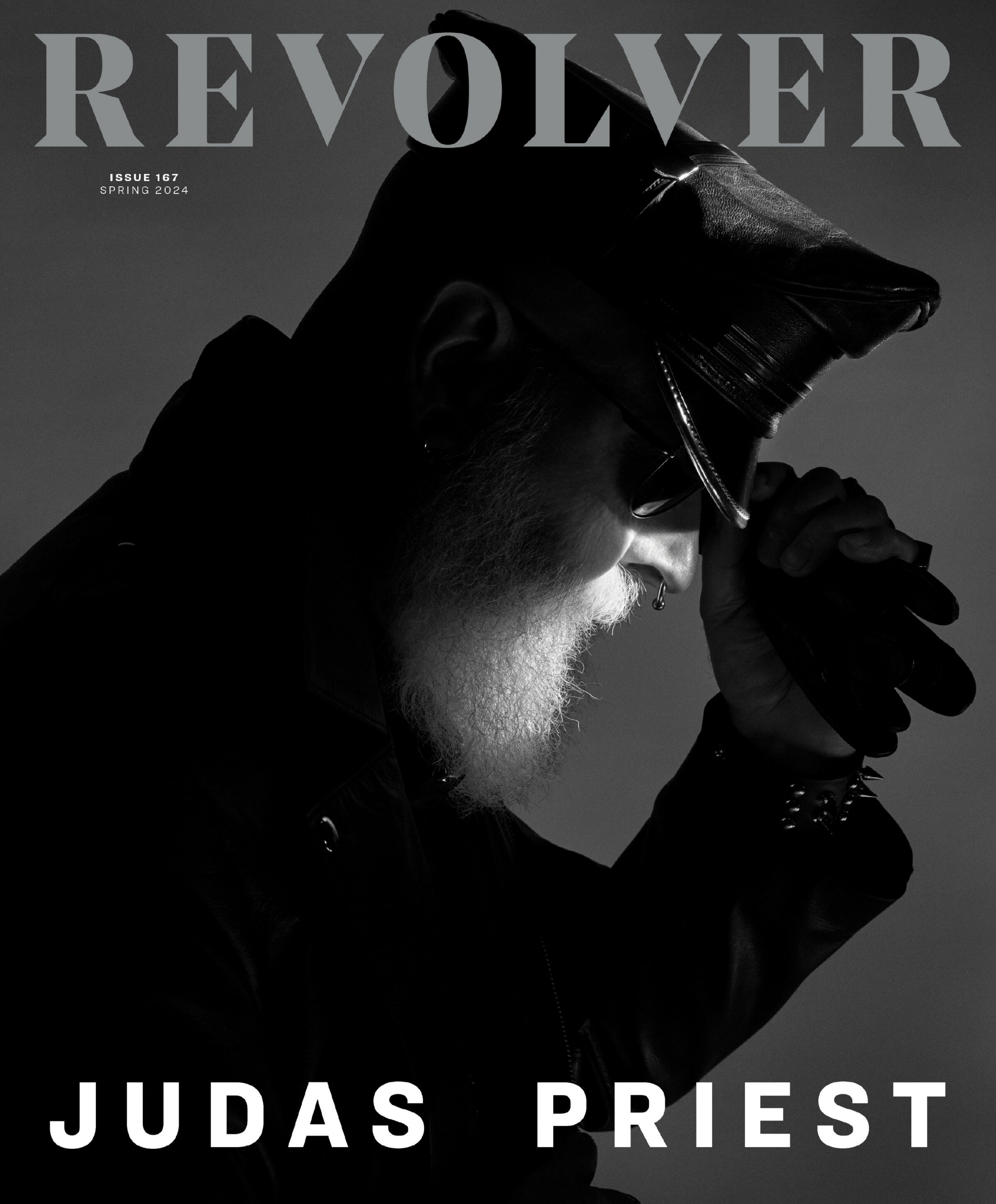

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

AS I WRITE THIS, I'VE JUST SURVIVED THE GREAT ECLIPSE OF 2024.
The apocalypse did not come. A few idiots probably lost their eyesight staring bare-eyeballed into the sun, but overall, humanity lived to see another day.

And one particular human, Maynard James Keenan, lived to see one particularly important day: April 17th, 2024, his 60th birthday.

Thank god. We need that guy.

We music fans need him, of course, for his many adventurous projects and his all-time-great voice. But we also need him for his attitude and example in life at large. We need him to tell us to put our fucking phones away and engage with the real world. We need to see his motivational, DIY, work-hard, no-one-owes-you-shit spirit in action.

We need him to remind us, as he does in *Revolver*'s video series with him, *The Art of Work*, and in this issue's cover story, that while the eclipse may not have taken us this time, we *will* die, and all that matters is what we do now — for ourselves, for our families, for our communities. As he says, talking with Les Claypool in the cover story: "I feel like we kind of owe it to ourselves and our family and the world. If you can do, you should do."

And not just do, but do *better*, as he's told us at *Revolver* more than a few times.

For all that he does, and all he will do — happy birthday, Maynard.

Settanta's gonna be *craaaazy*.

Brandon Geist
Chief Content Officer

REVOLVER

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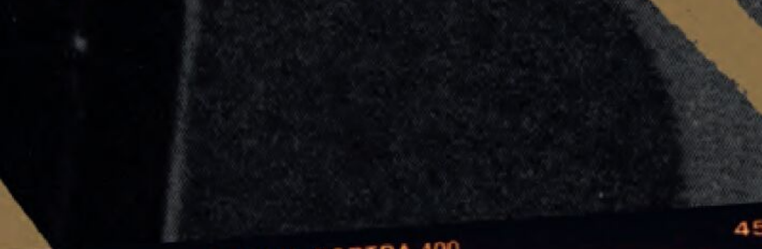
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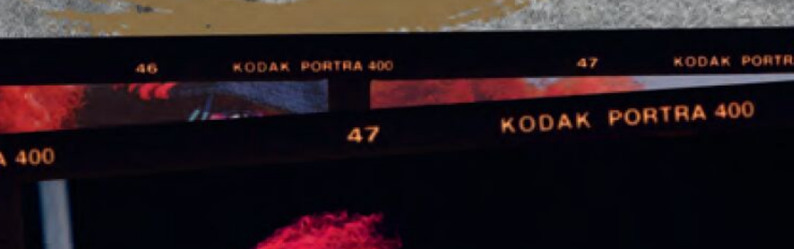
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UPRISING

HANABIE., 2024

ARTISTS YOU NEED TO KNOW NOW

MEI OKABE

01

HANABIE.

TEXT Emma Madden
PHOTOGRAPHY Mei Okabe

The Bizkit-endorsed Japanese band bringing hyperkinetic Harajuku-core to the world

IT WAS CALL TIME IN SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA. HANABIE.'S YUKINA – WHO WAS almost 5,000 miles away from her Tokyo home — looked out into the crowd of thousands from the side of the stage, a seemingly endless sea of faces that appeared to merge into one. Limp Bizkit's Fred Durst shouted her name, "YUKINA!" out into that vast swarm while Wes Borland played the instantly recognizable riff from the band's 1999 nu-metal anthem "Break Stuff." Yukina, outfitted in neon pink and green, pogoed out onto the stage to join the headliners, shouting: "I think you better quit lettin' shit slip/Or you'll be leavin' with a fat lip" alongside Durst into a crowd bigger than any she'd ever seen.

"It was a huge turning point for me," says Yukina, via a Japanese translator, who's also joined on the Zoom call by her bandmate and guitarist Matsuri. Almost 10 years before that heart-in-throat moment, they formed HANABIE. with friends at school. Yukina, the lead singer and screamer, says they had dizzying dreams of becoming "synonymous with the idea of a Japanese girl band." HANABIE. wanted to conquer their country. But then, almost a decade later, they found themselves supporting Limp Bizkit. Sharing the stage with the nu-metal mainstays — who rank among the globe's biggest legacy rock acts — forced them to shift the size of their ambitions. Now it was time for HANABIE. to take over the world.

HANABIE. blend elements of metalcore, groove metal, hyperpop and vocaloid into a musical style they call Harajuku-core, which borrows its name from Tokyo's colorful youth culture and fashion district (ground zero for the impeccably dressed gothic, cosplay, punk, biker and kawaii tribes). Through their music, HANABIE. are loudly and proudly bringing *otaku* — Japanese pop culture, particularly the passion for anime, manga and video games — to an international audience. They're quickly becoming one of the hottest topics in metal, and winning fans in every country while touring with icons including Bizkit, Slash and Bring Me the Horizon. Online, highly active fan pages, Reddits and Discord

servers are dedicated to them. Their hyperkinetic music videos now routinely reach millions of views on YouTube, inspiring extra-zealous comments from mostly English speakers. Last year, that frenzied fan activity helped prompt Sony's Epic Records to sign them and release their second studio album *Reborn Superstar!* To say this was all an unexpected turn of events is an understatement. Now, they no longer want to just be the first band that comes to mind when you hear "Japanese girl group." They want to be the *best* band you think of when you hear "rock."

They're well aware that the first step in achieving that goal is to step outside of BABYMETAL's shadow. But while there's no doubt that BABYMETAL's pioneering blend of kawaii and metal cultures helped open the gate for Japanese girl groups with a hard-rock edge, the comparisons between BABYMETAL and HANABIE. end at their gender and genre. As guitarist, Matsuri has a thicker post-grunge guitar tone compared to the classic power-chord stylings of BABYMETAL. And Yukina's songwriting takes a uniquely sociological slant, as she covers everything from Japanese corporate culture ("Pardon Me, I Have to Go Now") to nuanced meditations on the tantalizing yet addictive nature of cyberspace ("OTAKU Lovely Densetsu"). HANABIE.'s music is a self-reflexive commentary on Japanese culture itself — in particular, celebrating "being otaku" — as they attempt to reclaim and redefine it for themselves, as well as export it globally.

While half of the band, which also includes bassist Hettsu and drummer Chika, were raised only on Japanese music and culture, Yukina and Matsuri's upbringing was Western-influenced. They watched *The Powerpuff Girls* and various other American cartoons each Sunday morning. In anime they saw Japanese and American culture comingling, and recognized the coordinated impact they had on one another. *Sailor Moon* and *Evangelion*, Matsuri says, were also an enormous part of her formative years.

Yukina was exposed to metal from an early age, courtesy of her dad's record collection. She remembers hearing the death-metal growls rumbling from his stereo speakers as a child. "I was like, 'What?!' it was a little bit scary, actually," she says. Her fears were tempered with age and transformed into curiosity when, as a young teen, she discovered Maximum the Hormone, a Japanese hardcore punk band whose chaotic soundscapes and irreverent worldview are still massively influential to HANABIE. "[They] opened my ears up to band music in general," says Yukina.

At school, Yukina, Matsuri and Hettsu began covering Maximum the Hormone's songs during music classes at their all-girls junior school. While Matsuri and Hettsu learned to play their respective instruments via Maximum the Hormone tabs, Yukina acquired her mesmeric stage presence by practicing in front of small audiences at karaoke nights each weekend. The girls transitioned from Maximum the Hormone covers to original material soon after. To mark the change, they formed HANABIE. during their first year of high school, naming the band after the respective seasons in which they were born: Yukina's birthday is in the spring, hence, "hana," which means "flower" in Japanese; her bandmates were born in the winter months, thus, "bie," which means "cold."

As HANABIE., they self-produced and released their first singles "Crash Over" and "Sweet Killer" in 2016 and began performing at clubs around the city in their sophomore year, promoting shows with HANABIE.-dedicated social media accounts, and stretching their tentacles out to audiences beyond Tokyo. Social media, says Yukina, has both shifted otaku culture and brought it to a larger international audience. Matsuri, the gamer of the group and hardcore player of first-person shooter *Overwatch*, adds, "You get the sense that otaku used to be looked down upon, but social media has broken boundaries, to the point where we can feel proud of otaku culture like games and anime. The notion of 'otaku' has changed in a very good way."

The reclamation of otaku is largely why HANABIE. will keep writing their lyrics in Japanese. "Sometimes, I've felt tempted to write in English," says Yukina, "but then we toured abroad, and were so happy when we saw foreign fans singing our Japanese lyrics back to us."

HANABIE. performed abroad for the first time in 2023, playing a slew of highly buzzed-about shows across Europe and the U.S., including Louder Than Life and Aftershock. "We were seizing the moment, grabbing every opportunity, making the most out of everyday," says Yukina. "It changed everything when we saw how our crowds had worked to learn our Japanese lyrics. It really touched us," she says. "Even though it's a different language, everyone feels the same emotion together."

HANABIE.'s mission to bring their sound and otaku culture to the world continues this spring with more touring runs across North America and the EU. It's a journey they don't see stopping anytime soon. In fact, as far as they're concerned, HANABIE. are simply powering up for their next major breakthrough. "2024 will be all about laying the groundwork for bigger things," Yukina continues. "We'll be updating and upgrading." Matsuri chimes in: "First it was the world, now it's the universe." Ⓡ

Girl's Reform Manifest, 2021; *Reborn Superstar!*, 2023

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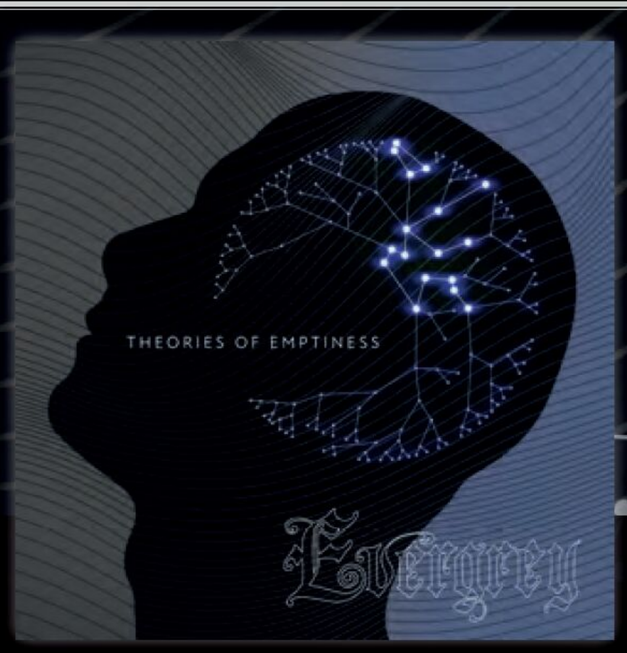

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02

TEXT Mia Hughes
PHOTOGRAPHY Vanessa Valadez

Brat

Meet the "Barbiecore" upstarts turning powerviolence pink

YOU'VE PROBABLY NEVER SEEN A ROOM OF crowd-killers busting out their best moves for Cascada's Eurodance banger "Everytime We Touch" — but this is par for the course at a Brat gig. The New Orleans four-piece, who released their debut LP *Social Grace* in March, are carrying the flag for an aesthetic that they've named "bimboviolence" or "Barbiecore." Led by frontwoman Liz Selfish, they're incorporating unabashed expressions of femininity and pop frivolity into their extreme metal. In between reps of brutal, misanthropic deathgrind, Brat love to turn up the bass like they're in a nightclub and take a minute to party to pop samples: Shania Twain's "Man! I Feel Like a Woman!" and Britney Spears' "Toxic" are a couple more favorites. You'll also find the color pink front-and-center in all of their merch, press photos and record covers.

"I love pink. I love glitter. I love pop music," Selfish tells us over Zoom. "I think there's a lot of people out there that can relate — [but] there's not as much of that visible in metal or hardcore yet." The band is completed by guitarist Brenner Moate, bassist Ian Hennessey and drummer Dustin Eagan; they formed after a karaoke night celebrating Moate's birthday in early 2020. "Mostly I just thought it was fun and funny, and that's kinda always our main driving factor," she continues. "But even in creating that kind of branding, there was definitely the idea of, Is this going to be looked down upon because it's more feminine?"

Make no mistake, Brat have encountered their fair share of pissed-off metal bros. But, for the most part, the response to Selfish and Co.'s hyper-pink, hyper-violent musical mash-up has been overwhelmingly positive. After dropping a few EPs and singles, Prosthetic Records signed them for *Social Grace*. They've made fans of OG NOLA groove-metal crew Exhorder, and shared bills with everyone from Cro-Mags and Eyehategod to ACxDC and Escuela Grind. With each off-the-chain performance they're winning over more and more folks: from young teens at their first shows to jaded old-heads.

"We're aware that there's a little bit of a gimmick with our band, because all too often you'll go to a heavy show and it's just kinda one-note," Eagan says. "We're having fun and letting people in on the fun, and I think what we do is very disarming to a lot of really hardcore metal fans. It's awesome when we kinda turn people at the shows, and they're like, 'I didn't know what was happening with the Britney Spears sample or this blonde chick onstage, and y'all just blew me away.'"

Of course, a gimmick is pointless if the music doesn't rip, and *Social Grace* is confirmation that Brat does indeed rip. The blast-beats are machine-gun tight; Selfish's vocals are guttural and mean; and riffs like the one in "Slow Heat" aim for the scrunched-up-face hall of fame. Moate is responsible for the lyrics, which are a lot darker than the band's Barbie facade suggests. Across the album, he's lamenting the sins and the guilt of the human race — including the effects of the climate crisis he sees firsthand in his home state. "In south Louisiana, we've all but destroyed the natural wonder of the bayou region," says Moate. "Rapidly accelerating erosion directly caused by industry and human activity will one day erase the land I grew up on, possibly in my lifetime."

It's dire stuff; but, Moate says, the effect of coating these heavy lyrical and musical ideas in bright-pink sugar at their shows is a life-affirming experience for the band members. "Feeling nothing but darkness leads to despair, but feeling nothing but lightness leads to denial about how terrible things can be," Moate says. "Both of these things together, to me, embody the full human experience; that's why this band is so special to me."

The power of that feeling expands beyond the stage too. While fun is always at the forefront for Brat, it turns out their lighthearted and accessible approach to heavy music has had a deeper impact than they could have predicted. "We've definitely had people tell us that they feel more comfortable or open at a show because of our aesthetic, particularly women or queer people, which has been really cool," Selfish says. "I had someone come up to me at a show and tell me their daughter was struggling with their gender identity, and that showing her Brat helped her with just being able to be who you wanna be."

"There's a bunch of really cool comments, too, on some of our videos, of dads showing their daughters [and saying], 'This is how I want my kid to get into heavy music,'" adds Eagan. "You know, maybe Brat's that gateway band to something bigger, which is wild to think.

"It's pretty sick when we come on and we see a pit full of women or queer people — people who are underrepresented in our scene — just going apeshit. It's honestly a beautiful thing."

Social Grace, 2024

Brat, (from left) Ian Hennessey, Brenner Moate, Liz Selfish and Dustin Eagan

Spaced

Bred on Turnstile and Taylor Swift, this Buffalo "far-out hardcore" crew want to be a gateway, not gatekeepers

TEXT Mia Hughes
PHOTOGRAPHY Aaron Heather

This Is All We Ever Get, 2024; *Spaced Jams*, 2022

SPACED VOCALIST LEXI REYNGOUDT HAS A MESSAGE to all the hardcore snobs out there: "If you're only strictly listening to hardcore, I feel like that's a *you* problem." The Buffalo, New York, crew all live and breathe the genre; but that doesn't mean they feel any need to give into purism. "I am unapologetically a Swiftie!" Reyngoudt declares.

The band — Reyngoudt, guitarists Donny Arthur and Joe Morganti, bassist John Vaughan and drummer Dan McCormick — just released their debut full-length *This Is All We Ever Get* via Revelation Records. While you won't hear any Taylor Swift references in these songs, it's obvious Spaced have an eclectic taste in music. They call their style "far-out hardcore" — their riffs and Reyngoudt's confrontational vocals are obviously indebted to bands like Gorilla Biscuits and early Turnstile, yet a lot of their guitar tones and ideas are deliberately drawn from My Bloody Valentine, Sonic Youth and even the Grateful Dead.

"Experimenting with different pedals and sounds and textures is something Joe and John are really into, and Donny's always like, 'OK, what if we get these psychedelic riffs into here?'" Reyngoudt explains. For her part, the vocalist draws on her love of pop when constructing sing-along choruses and channeling emotional honesty into her lyrics. Spaced's non-traditional, expansive take on hardcore is attracting fans new to the genre, as well as earning notable co-signs from the Armed, Militarie Gun, Cancer Bats and others. The buzz around the band is only continuing to grow — and they aren't deterred by any of the detractors that come with it.

"We've definitely had people being like, 'This isn't *real* hardcore, blah blah blah,'" Reyngoudt says, adding that the band often hear such complaints about their appearances on mixed-genre bills. Despite the grumbles, Spaced are always down for those performances. Reyngoudt recalls one such show — opening for Canadian pop-punks Arm's Length — being among the best they've ever played. "Their fans were like, 'I don't know what this is, but this is so cool. I'm gonna stage dive the entire time!' And that's exactly what I want!" she says. Spaced are proud to be a gateway band: "[Fans] come up to the merch table and are like, 'This is my first time seeing a hardcore band, what else should I listen to?' So a lot of people don't love that we [play those shows], but I don't care, because we're bringing more people into the scene."

Spaced began when Reyngoudt and McCormick, who have been a couple for several years, met tattoo artist and 15-year hardcore veteran Arthur. During her tattoo sessions, Reyngoudt would chat with Arthur about hardcore, a genre which she was relatively new to but quickly falling in love with. He encouraged her to start a band, but she was too shy. So instead he got together with McCormick, Morganti and Vaughan and wrote Spaced's first demo. "They just presented me these songs and were like, 'Here's this band for you, you have to sing in it,'" she remembers.

Since Spaced's 2021 debut, *DEMO*, Reyngoudt's lyrics have often included fierce rebuttals of scene gatekeepers ("It's okay if you don't get it, you're elitist and boring," goes "Prove You Wrong," from 2022's *Spaced Jams* comp) and anthemic calls for individuality. On *This Is All We Ever Get,* she takes a broader and more fully-formed approach to standing strong in her own identity. "If you know who you are, you control your destiny," she declares on "Big Picture."

"For this album, we're still talking about how it's OK to be yourself. But there are some songs that are like, I'm kinda tired of telling people I'm OK to be myself. I'm almost more angry that I have to *continue* to tell people that," she says. "I am bisexual. I use she/they pronouns. I'm gender non-conforming. It can get to those points where I just feel like I am in this corner and not allowed to do anything. So it is cool to just be like, hey, I'm gonna take up space, and I don't care what you think about it, because I deserve to be here and so does everybody else that's different."

The band have so far taken that message on tour all across the U.S., Europe and the U.K., with stints supporting some of their heroes including Militarie Gun, the Armed and Comeback Kid. But as much as they love being on the road, Spaced's heart remains with their Buffalo hometown scene. They're devoted to helping to revive hardcore in the city.

"This past weekend I went to a local show. It was all young local bands, and it was packed. That's what's really cool about Buffalo hardcore right now — it's young kids finding any show that they can go to and mosh and have fun," Reyngoudt says. "We're trying our best to get as many bands to come here as possible."

No matter how Spaced's sound or their music taste might branch out, this sense of responsibility to keep a community alive is the essence of hardcore. Just don't be surprised if you hear Swift's "We Are Never Ever Getting Back Together" blasting through the speakers in between sets. Ⓡ

Spaced, New Cross Inn,
London, 2024

Siiickbrain

TEXT Emma Madden
PHOTOGRAPHY Sam Finelli

Model Caroline Smith went viral for her fearless genre-bending music. Her new acoustic EP is her boldest move yet.

WHEN CAROLINE SMITH – A.K.A. SIIICKBRAIN – TOOK an electric razor to her head in 2016 she watched as several years and inches worth of traumatic memories fell limp on the floor. Her whole life of terror discarded in a bundle of brunette waves. When she'd shorn every last hair, she touched her buzz-cut head and felt the beginning of the rest of her life. The girl with the sick brain had been let loose.

Flash forward, and Smith — with her iconic, still-buzzed look — is now armed with an equally bold sound that takes influence from $uicideboy$'s dour trap, Deftones' sludgy sensuality and Bring Me the Horizon's heavy, genre-blending experiments. Starting in 2020, Smith — who had already made a name for herself as a successful fashion model — began unleashing an array of viral singles under the Siiickbrain moniker that blended caustic screams with industrial beats and catchy, indelible hooks. High-profile co-signs and collabs soon followed; and Smith found herself mixing it up with an eclectic set of artists: from BMTH, Pussy Riot and Skrillex to Maggie Lindemann, Willow Smith and others.

Last year, she expanded the Siiickbrain lore with *My Masochistic Mind* — her kinetic full-length debut filled with blasted-out beats and equally enticing and eviscerating vocals. Now, with her new acoustic EP, *dizzy spells*, she's shifting direction and sanding down her sound to reveal the rawest, most vulnerable version of Siiickbrain yet. Smith's story is one of continually stripping away fear to find new creative freedoms. And the freer she gets, the wilder, and more popular, her art becomes. But what makes this sick brain tick? The path to understanding that begins in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Growing up on a farm in North Carolina, as a child, she loved the state's vibrant green landscape: its rivers, its flowers, the horses at the stable. She was surrounded by music. Her mother was a talented pianist and cellist, her brother a prodigy on the guitar. Everyone in her family played an instrument, and music filled the house at all hours. In the pockets of quiet moments, a young Smith wrote poetry — a skill that she found could later be transferred to her songs. Though that was several fear-filled years away.

In her preteen years, her idyllic life turned horrific. All of the evils that childhood sheltered her from suddenly emerged. She lived in what she calls an "extremely conservative" community where abuse ran rife. "I started realizing the scary parts of life," she says. "There's a lot of evil in the world."

Smith developed severe anxiety and agoraphobia, a condition that leaves a person paralyzed with fear and often unable to leave the house. As the years went by, Smith's world grew smaller and smaller. Though she'd been an adventurous child, as a teenager, whenever she tried to walk out the door she felt like she was going to faint. "I couldn't breathe," she says.

While Smith spent her days anxiety-wracked on the couch, retreating further and further from the outside world, the few friends she did have slowly but surely fell out of the picture. The only remedy was to run far, far away. And so she did the most drastic thing she could: forced herself off the couch and moved to New York City.

When she arrived, to study makeup artistry, she enrolled herself in countless hours of therapy, hell-bent on breaking out of her own terrified brain. She tried a lot of medications, and eventually found one that worked. Finally in 2013, feeling somewhat regulated, she asked herself: "How about moving to L.A.?"

There, with a newfound confidence in the new city, she decided to give modeling a shot. It was at a time when brands were looking to diversify. Smith, who by that point was covered in tattoos, including one on her eyelid, was often typecast as "the crazy

"I realized the harsh reality of life: It's short. I woke up and pushed myself to do the things I actually wanted to do."
— Caroline Smith

one." She would go on to book campaigns with global brands and appear in the pages of taste-making publications including *Vogue Paris*, *Vogue London*, and more. But it all came to a halt, of course, in 2020.

Then, not long into lockdown, tragedy struck when Smith lost her best friend to an overdose. It was a brutal wake-up call. "I just realized the harsh reality of life: It's extremely short and fragile." Music had always been in the back of her brain, a dream that teased at her; a dream that was steadily clouded over by fear. But it wasn't until the devastating loss of her friend — and the shocking realization of life's impermanence — that the singer finally shed her fears and dared to pursue music. "Finally, I woke up, and pushed myself to do the things that I actually wanted to do."

A series of serendipitous events occurred shortly after. A friend with a studio encouraged her to come over for a recording session. The moment she got in front of the microphone, Smith realized intuitively, immediately: "Yeah, this is what I was always supposed to be doing." From that session, she recorded her first-ever song, "Cigarettes and Cartier," a screaming, raging transplant of raw emotion that was a tribute to her friend. "I feel your ghost inside my head," she cried on the track. Within weeks of its release, it amassed hundreds of thousands of streams.

After only three months of recording, superstar producer and former hardcore head Skrillex DM'ed her on Instagram, asking whether she'd be interested in a collaboration. She soon found herself in his studio, learning the ropes from one of the best in the business. "TOO BIZARRE," the trap-meets-drum-n-bass banger, resulted from the session, and soon went on to rack up millions of streams.

Smith's star rose exponentially as she rubbed shoulders with Hollywood's musical elite. She befriended alt-pop artists Willow Smith and Maggie Lindemann, both of whom share her penchant for the dark side, and she later collaborated with each musician — adding a visceral dose of cathartic rage to Lindemann's "GASLIGHT!," "break me!," "deprecating" and Willow Smith's "PURGE."

After several months of recording, Smith did her first performance alongside Lindemann, on a live-stream with an audience of thousands. After only a few more performances, Smith scored her first show at an arena when she opened for Bring Me the Horizon in Brooklyn, New York. "I was terrified," she says. "But it was like boot camp for me, I learned so much." After being thrown in at the deepest end, she now has her feet firmly planted on the ground.

When we speak, Smith has just wrapped up work on the *dizzy spells* EP that she'll release this spring. "It's very different from anything that I've ever done," she says of the tracks, which range from the pillowy emo rap of "when i fall" (featuring Shiloh Dynasty and No Love for the Middle Child) to the clean vocal/acoustic guitar indie folk of "when you're not mine." "I'm super excited about it," she continues. "It's the most honest and raw stuff that I've ever done."

Smith wrote the songs in her bedroom, transmuting her feelings into furiously immediate tirades. A kind of therapy. A cleanse. A way for her to process and offload the past several months' worth of professional success and personal heartbreak, loneliness and displacement.

"I went through a lot of changes within the past five months," she says. For one, she had to fire her manager (for legal reasons, she can't tell me why), while some of her relationships outside of music were beginning to strain. She began to isolate and withdraw into herself, staying at home to write. That was, until a fire in her building broke out. Her already scattered life had become almost unmanageable, and she moved temporarily into a hotel room, where she wrote most of the EP's haunting songs. "Everything fell through the cracks," she says. "I had to scramble and try to refind myself."

It was the loneliest she'd ever felt. But with the hard reality of her life in disarray, she was forced to regather herself with intention. She cut off the people in her life who no longer fit and sliced away at her remaining fears. Smith has since re-emerged as an even more considerate and innovative artist: one unconcerned with trends or hitting it big on TikTok, but fully engaged in creating something new, something fresh. "That's what sets me apart," she says. "I'm creating things that didn't previously exist." Ⓡ

My Masochistic Mind, 2023

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GEL, Avondale Music Hall, Chicago, 2023

TEXT Mia Hughes
PHOTOGRAPHY Jeremy Messmore

GEL

These New Jersey outsiders are creating "hardcore for the freaks." But what happens when the freaks become popular?

AT A TIME WHEN HARDCORE IS BIGGER THAN EVER, being broadcasted on late-night television and soundtracking Taco Bell commercials, GEL's motto is like a siren call for the genre's true-blue outsiders: "Hardcore for the freaks."

The idea is that GEL's caustic, stomp-and-clomp music is a safe haven for anyone who feels isolated and marginalized — a rallying cry against the cool-kid cliques that crop up within even this ostensibly anti-establishment subculture. But GEL's slogan isn't something they concocted to attract more folks to their steadily growing fanbase. It's core to their identity: The music they're making is hardcore for the freaks...by the freaks.

"Most of my life I have struggled to feel a sense of home or security," frontperson Sami Kaiser tells *Revolver*. "I was very fearful of people, especially in public or group settings. This crippling anxiety has and still bubbles to the surface and exacerbates tendencies that may be considered strange."

To Kaiser, the motto, and the whole ethos of GEL, is an expression of the powerful bond the members share as fellow misfits. But what happens when the "freaks" become popular? In the last couple years, GEL have become one of the biggest names in hardcore. Their rowdy, free-spirited live shows are packed to the gills all across North America. Their rippin' 2023 debut full-length, *Only Constant*, is one of the most widely acclaimed hardcore albums of the 2020s. This year, these hardcore oddballs have their thorny logo on the bills of blockbuster festivals like Download and Primavera Sound in Europe, and Sick New World in Las Vegas. And their new EP, *Persona*, will be released this August via Blue Grape Records, a new label spearheaded by former Roadrunner Records bigwig David Rath.

"We started playing music very DIY and I've never had grandiose dreams of fame or recognition," Kaiser says. "Quite literally the opposite with my social anxiety."

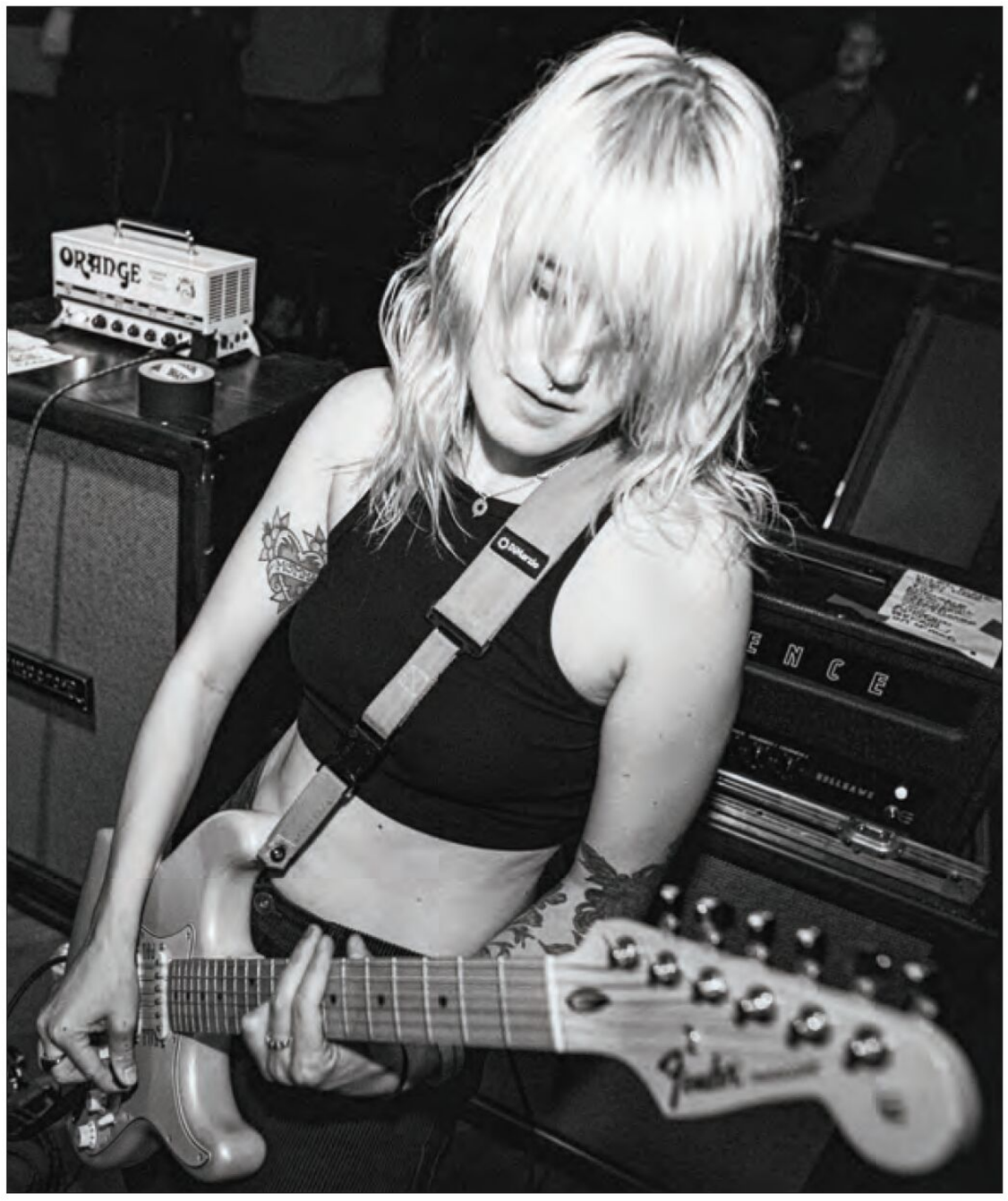
Even so, GEL are open to taking their band's unlikely success as far as it can go. But can they do that while still keeping things "freak-forward," as guitarist Anthony Webster puts it? The prospects are looking good. Everything GEL's accomplished thus far has defied the odds — including the very fact that the band still exists.

"GEL was never supposed to be a band," Webster tells *Revolver* during a separate chat. "It was supposed to be a project. Like, 'Hey, we're going to do a demo and [play] four shows and then be done, go back to doing our other thing.'"

That other thing was Sick Shit, the powerviolence band that GEL's four original members — vocalist Kaiser, guitarist Webster, bassist Bobko and ex-drummer Zach Miller — played in when they were all living in New Jersey. (The band have since added guitarist Madison Nave and traded Miller for Alex Salter, and now they're all spread throughout the East Coast, with Webster being the last remaining Jersey resident.) During a drive back from a show in 2018, the members of Sick Shit had the idea to record a one-off demo for a different-sounding band, one that channeled the noisy, reverb-laden hardcore that bands like BIB, Gag and Hoax were making in the latter half of the 2010s. Once the demo dropped, the members realized they liked the feel of this new band better than their old one, so GEL became their main affair. Nevertheless, it was a rocky start.

"It was so rough at first," Webster says of GEL's early shows, shaking his head. "We didn't sound good."

GEL just kept playing until they got good — and people took notice. Their 2019 promo tape, bearing the flag-planting title *HC FOR THE FREAKS*, picked


ORANGE

MUNICIPAL WASTE

"There's just a type of person, like a weird kid, and we all resonate with that person more."
— Anthony Webster

up a decent buzz outside of the New Jersey underground, and the band hit the road for their first tour. To their surprise, GEL ended up breaking even on the run — a big win for a no-budget DIY hardcore band, and enough encouragement to make them "go all-in" on touring once COVID restrictions were lifted.

"None of us really have any strong ties to home," Webster says. "None of us went to college, none of us have careers, none of us have husbands, wives, kids, or responsibilities of that nature. I mean, [in the early 2020s] three of us were living in a trailer park. We truly had just nothing to lose."

Since then, GEL have only gained. After 2021's *Violent Closure* EP and their 2022 *Shock Therapy* split with Cold Brats, GEL became an undeniable force in the hardcore scene. Hundreds of people were coming out to the shows on their self-booked 2022 U.S. tour, a feat that Webster and his bandmates didn't "know how to process" at the time. The full-length album that followed, 2023's gnarly *Only Constant*, only took them higher. At once brisk, angry and invigorating, the 16-minute onslaught was an unexpected crossover hit. It became the kind of hardcore album even people who don't normally like hardcore had on their year-end lists, and earned surprising nods from Pitchfork and *The New York Times*.

They knew whatever their next project was had to be better. "And I can say for a fact that we've done that with our next batch of songs," Webster says of the tracks on *Persona*, which the guitarist describes as "heavier" and "darker" than any of GEL's previous music. Moreover, Kaiser's lyrics are as raw and honest as ever.

"I talk about shit that's happened in my life," they say. "I have trauma, so I have experiences that I dwell on every day: unhealthy environments, relationships, coping mechanisms."

Between the ghastly sound and uncompromising lyrics, GEL's music is still catered to people on society's fringes. They can be performing *for* thousands of bobbing heads at these massive summer festivals, but Webster says that they're always playing *to* the undulating freaks upfront — the people who GEL are when they're off the stage.

"There's just a type of person, like a weird kid, and we all resonate with that person more," Webster says. "None of us are cool, none of us are social, none of us are popular in any way."

And they're adamant about relishing their weirdness even as their profile grows. GEL's initial mission statement remains constant, but there is one thing that's changed as the band have gotten bigger and their freak family has grown wider.

"Where [the phrase] 'hardcore for the freaks' maybe started as a spite move," Webster explains. "It kind of became not that anymore, and I think that's kind of cool."

When asked what he thinks the motto transformed into, Webster takes a second to ponder and then responds firmly yet proudly: "A celebration."

Persona EP, 2024; *Only Constant*, 2023; *Violent Closure* EP, 2021

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VANGUARD

Maynard James Keenan, 2024

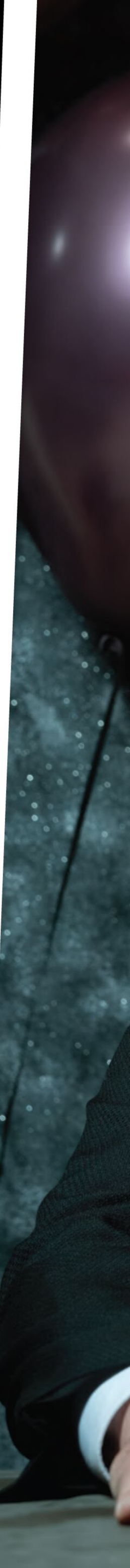
REBELS, INNOVATORS AND ICONOCLASTS

SEAN MURPHY

MAYNARD JAMES KEENAN

The TOOL, A Perfect Circle and Puscifer frontman looks back on 60 years of getting weird – in conversation with longtime friend and fellow alt-metal oddball Les Claypool

TEXT **Steve Appleford**
PHOTOGRAPHY **Sean Murphy**



For Maynard James Keenan,

time is both a friend and the enemy. He's never been busier, filling his days, months and years as frontman and creative force for TOOL, A Perfect Circle and Puscifer — all wildly diverse, ambitious musical operations. There's also the winery at the center of his life back home in Jerome, Arizona, plus his ongoing practice as a newly minted black belt in Brazilian jiu-jitsu, not to mention the wife and kids, and beloved Yorkie by his side.

In 2024, Keenan turns 60, a number that can sometimes startle the still-vibrant singer and family man — but isn't slowing him down in the least. He has chosen to confront the milestone head-on, with a multi-date birthday tour called Sessanta, gathering some of the finest creative forces at his disposal: his bands Puscifer and A Perfect Circle, and, as the wild card on the bill, his friends in Primus. The U.S. tour also arrives with a special three-song *Sessanta E.P.P.P.*, featuring one new song from each act (and all three tracks co-written by Keenan).

A decade earlier, Keenan celebrated his 50th birthday with Cinquanta, a two-night stand at the Greek Theatre in Los Angeles, with Puscifer and A Perfect Circle sharing the stage with a reunited Failure. (The show was immortalized earlier this year with the release of the live album *Cinquanta: A 50th Birthday Celebration for Maynard James Keenan - Live.*) Like that event, Sessanta puts all three acts onstage at the same time, leading to serendipitous sparks of inspiration and amusement.

"It just opens up a whole set of doors for keeping the knife sharp," Keenan says of these collaborations, "but also you never know what's going to come out of it."

To pull off Sessanta, Keenan once again enlisted his main collaborators (outside of TOOL): A Perfect Circle guitarist-producer Billy Howerdel and his Puscifer partners Mat Mitchell and Carina Round. Joining them on the EP and tour is Primus, led by singer-bassist Les Claypool, who Keenan first met on the 1993 Lollapalooza tour. For *Sessanta E.P.P.P.*, Maynard and Primus created a track of weird thundering funk about the wayward hippos once owned by the late Colombian drug lord Pablo Escobar.

To discuss Sessanta and their three-decade meeting of the minds, Keenan and Claypool have agreed to a joint interview with *Revolver* via Zoom, which happened to land on Valentine's Day. Claypool drops in from his home in the wine country of Sonoma County, California, where he has his own Purple Pachyderm winery. And Keenan calls from Los Angeles,

THOR
I ♥
randpa

Primus' Les Claypool

where TOOL is performing the first of two sold-out nights. As always, Keenan is keeping busy and has already spent the morning shooting promos for the Sessanta tour. Wandering behind him on the Zoom feed is Shoresy — his little Yorkie (named after the fan-favorite *Letterkenny* character) — whose presence on the road "keeps me even," he says.

Claypool, who also just turned 60, notes that he had a similar experience to Sessanta in 2022 during a pair of concerts at Red Rocks Amphitheatre near Denver that collided Primus and Ween to mark the 25th anniversary of *South Park*. (Primus created the show's long-running theme song). "That's right in the Ween wheelhouse," Keenan agrees with a nod. For the Sessanta tour, Keenan's APC and Puscifer collaborators will be joined onstage by Claypool and long-serving Primus band members, guitarist Larry "Ler" LaLonde and drummer Tim Alexander.

For an artist as creatively restless as Keenan, navigating the calculated chaos of Sessanta is a fitting response as he stares down 60. It's sure to be a good time, but it's only a temporary diversion from the clock — and the ongoing mission at hand. After that, the singer notes, there's no time to waste. He has three groups going, and he expects all of them will soon be in the process of creating new music. Over the coming year and a half, he says, "I've got three bands that need to write songs — so I'm going to be doing that."

DO YOU REMEMBER YOUR FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF EACH OTHER AND HOW YOU MET?

MAYNARD JAMES KEENAN We don't do impressions. [*Wags finger at camera*]

LES CLAYPOOL Yes, there's this app called Grindr. That's where we first found each other. [*Laughs*]

WHEN WOULD THAT HAVE BEEN?

KEENAN Lollapalooza '93.

CLAYPOOL I remember Maynard was working out a lot. But my first impression of Maynard was when he invited me to his house to meet his turkeys, which I found very odd. I never did actually meet the turkeys, but that was my very first encounter with Maynard. I imagine that was a substantial ice-breaking element.

KEENAN We had a friend who had turkeys. I'm going to get his name wrong, but from *Leave It to Beaver*, the kind of annoying neighbor kid? What was his name?

CLAYPOOL Old Turkey Joe.

KEENAN After *Leave It to Beaver*, he became a cop in the Valley.

CLAYPOOL Wait a minute. You're not talking about "Eddie Haskell"?

KEENAN Yes, Eddie Haskell [played by Ken Osmond] was a cop in the San Fernando Valley. He had a couple of rentals, and [TOOL's] Adam [Jones] rented from

MAKEUP: ANGELINA BUTERA; PHOTO ASSISTANT BABY Z; PROPS: JESSICA HEIT; THIS PAGE: JASON GOODRICH

Eddie Haskell, and he had turkeys for some reason. He had too many, so I ended up with Eddie Haskell's extra turkey.

CLAYPOOL See, now that's the title of a song right there: "Eddie Haskell's Extra Turkey." I'm impressed. I've never met anyone who knew Eddie Haskell, let alone inherited turkeys from Eddie Haskell.

KEENAN Our life is a weird thing.

LES, LAST YEAR YOU PLAYED A BENEFIT IN L.A. WITH TOOL'S JUSTIN CHANCELLOR AND DANNY CAREY, AND TROY VAN LEEUWEN, WHO WAS IN THE ORIGINAL A PERFECT CIRCLE LINEUP AND NOW PLAYS WITH QUEENS OF THE STONE AGE. YOU PERFORMED TOOL'S "ÆNIMA." WHAT WAS IT LIKE TO BE MAYNARD FOR A FEW MINUTES?

KEENAN He had to scrunch down a little bit.

CLAYPOOL I was doing some scrunching. I was doing some hand movements. I very much enjoyed that. I'm not good at getting on the microphone unless I have a hunk of wood with some strings on it between me and the audience. And it was one of the very rare times that I actually stood in front of a crowd without that electric hunk of furniture strapped to me. And it was actually exciting and a bit liberating.

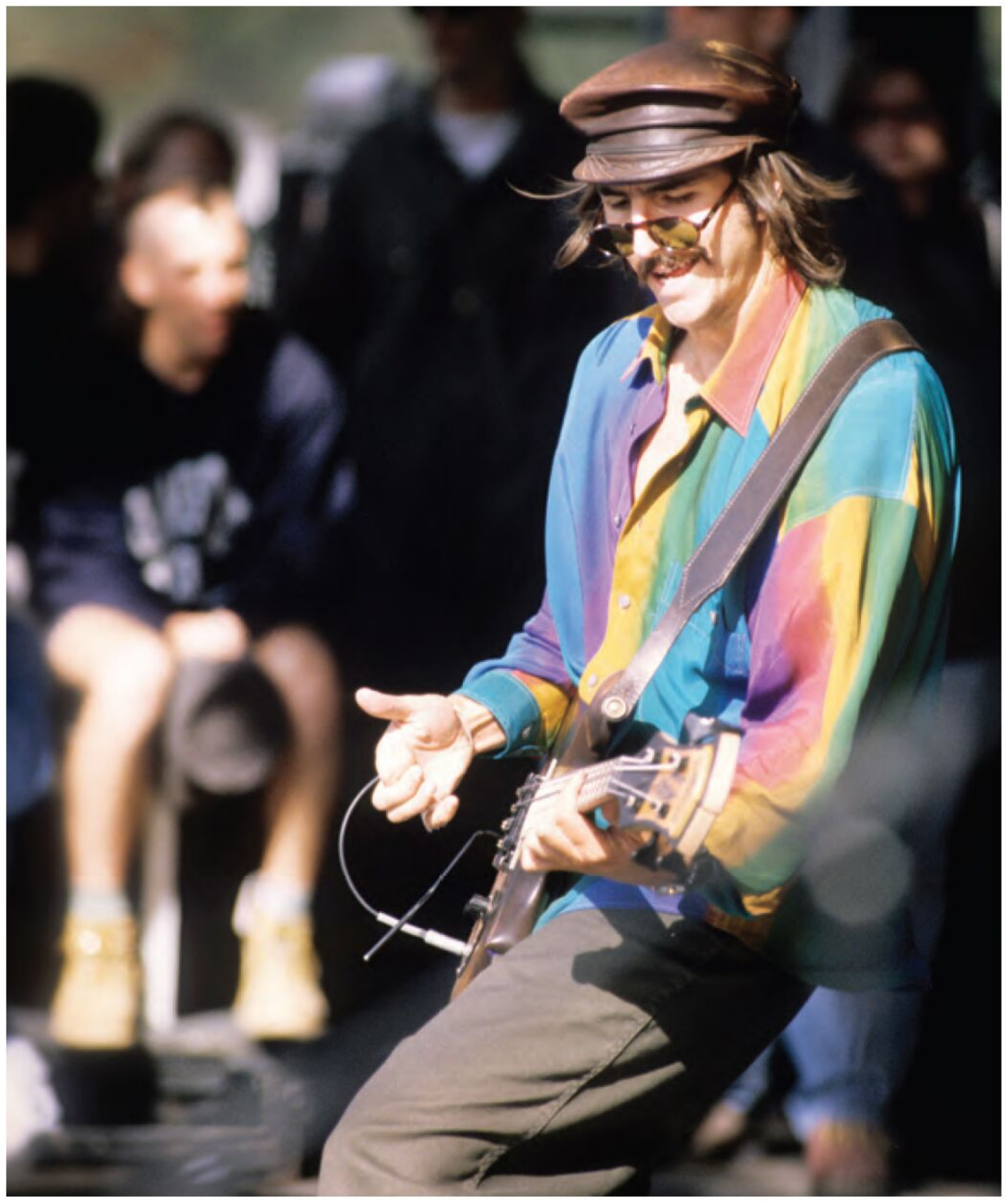
MAYNARD, THIS SESSANTA TOUR MARKS A BIG BIRTHDAY FOR YOU, AS YOU DID 10 YEARS AGO WITH YOUR CINQUANTA SHOWS AT THE GREEK THEATRE IN LOS ANGELES. WHAT IS IT ABOUT THESE LIFE MARKERS THAT YOU WANT TO CELEBRATE?

KEENAN It's just pure panic. It's pure fear of death. Let's just celebrate this absolutely terrifying marker. I had this idea years ago — back when we did Lollapalooza, when everybody was jamming with each other onstage in '93 — I always wanted to do something like this. I was actually going to do six [bands]. That just was a train wreck of an idea — so it's three bands playing. There is no headliner. There is no opener. We don't ever really leave the stage. We have some couches on the stage. You're just kind of hanging out. But that way you're going back and forth a couple moments where you're playing on each other's songs. And from the EP we just did, we do the three songs and then close with something like…

CLAYPOOL "(Don't Fear) the Reaper"! Isn't that what this is really all about? I just turned 60. You just turned 60. We do all these songs together. We have this big Shambhala on stage, and then at the end we say, "Don't fear the reaper!" [*Laughs*]

HOW DID THE *SESSANTA E.P.P.P.* COME TOGETHER?

KEENAN I always leave the Pro Tools and Logic stuff up to Mat Mitchell or Billy



(clockwise, from top left) Primus' Les Claypool playing Pukkelpop Festival while Keenan watches side stage, Hasselt, Belgium, 1993; Keenan performing with TOOL, 1996; Keenan singing with Puscifer, 2023; Keenan in A Perfect Circle, 1999

UPPER LEFT: GIE KNAEPS/GETTY IMAGES; UPPER RIGHT: PATTI OUDERKIRK/WIREIMAGE; LOWER LEFT: BOB BERG/GETTY IMAGES; LOWER RIGHT: JORDI VIDAL/REDFERNS

> "I have a lot of friends that are in incredible bands, but many of them — God bless 'em — they're rigid. They wouldn't be able to do this Sessanta thing."
> — Maynard James Keenan

[Howerdel], and [producer] Joe Barresi a little bit. I finally dove in about a year and a half ago, where I wouldn't let myself have my morning coffee until I at least figured out a beat, maybe a piano melody. So I had this little folder of stuff. When this tour was coming up, I was like, I'm going to take three of these songs and farm it out: I'll send one to Billy, I'll send one to Mat and Carina, and I'll send one to Les, Larry and Tim to see what comes out of it. We actually did a little EP — three songs for commemorating the Sessanta.

THIS BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION LANDS DURING A PERIOD WHEN YOU'RE BUSIER THAN EVER. ALL THREE OF YOUR BANDS ARE PRETTY ACTIVE. IS THIS AN INTERESTING TIME FOR YOU, OR A CRISIS?

KEENAN Crisis, man. What the hell? I don't know what I was thinking. I'm an idiot. And with all the restaurant stuff going on and winery things going on in Arizona, and then three bands, I think it's time to go to law school.

EVEN SO, YOU'RE DOING GREAT WORK WITH ALL THREE BANDS. DID YOU FIGURE SOMETHING OUT ABOUT HOW TO BALANCE EVERYTHING?

KEENAN It really is time management that it comes down to. Being in a successful band, time gets away from you because you get super lazy. There are times during the day to do things. But it's also important to leave space in there to get your head straight. I really admire Les with his absolute: "I'm gonna go fishing." And back on Lollapalooza '93, that to me was like, "Holy fuck, he found the thing that gets his head straight [from] all this rock madness." You are dealing with people almost dying from drug overdoses over here and crazy bickering and weird rock shit over there. And then this guy's over by that pond fishing, going, "You guys are idiots." I thought that was great.

HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN THAT ATTITUDE, LES?

CLAYPOOL Maynard and I are kindred spirits. We have a lot of shit going on. I attribute all my shit going on to boredom. If I'm not doing something, it makes me depressed. If I'm not turning over a new rock, I go into a funk. So I have a little winery, I have a few bands and I still have time to go fishing. And nowadays I've been flying. I'm a pilot now. I feel like you have to do these things to maintain your sanity.

YOU BOTH SHARE A PASSION FOR WINEMAKING. WAS THERE SOMETHING FROM MUSIC THAT LED YOU NATURALLY IN THAT DIRECTION?

CLAYPOOL For me it's coincidence. I just happen to live in the mecca of California Pinot Noir, which is West Sonoma County. If you live in Hollywood, who comes to your barbecues? It's people that are in the entertainment industry. Where I live, people that come to your barbecues bring a bottle of wine, because they're working for a cooperage or they're a vineyard manager. But I'm a charlatan. Maynard's actually a winemaker. I write a check every year to a winemaker to make our wine. I used to be involved in the process much more, but our guy is just amazing. So I step back and play the bass and design the labels. For us, it's a lifestyle thing more than anything.

IS THERE ANYTHING MAYNARD DOES AS A WINEMAKER THAT YOU'VE ALWAYS BEEN CURIOUS ABOUT?

CLAYPOOL How do you keep your sanity? I've been to Maynard's place and it's amazing. I love his setup. I find it very interesting the way you've designed your fermenting vats and whatnot. It's very cool. It's much different than what I've seen around here. I am not so much involved in that process anymore, but I admire what Maynard does because it's a shitload of work. I don't see how you can pull it all off and do three bands and be a father and have your restaurants and your jiu-jitsu facilities and whatnot. And this is coming from a guy that people think that about me. [*Laughs*]

KEENAN That's why we consider each other kindred spirits. There's no excuse to not do some stuff and get some things done, just because you can, and you should. Whatever magic box we opened up back in the day to where we were on that tour to begin with, I feel like we kind of owe it to ourselves and our family and the world. If you can do, you should do.

YOU BOTH ALSO HAVE A REPUTATION FOR HAVING A CERTAIN KIND OF SENSE OF HUMOR. HAS THAT BEEN HELPFUL IN DEALING WITH MUSIC OR WINEMAKING?

KEENAN Absolutely. You kind of wonder what you're going to put on your tombstone, and I narrowed it down to several. But the one that should go on there is "Comedy first. Always."

CLAYPOOL I like that.

KEENAN For me, that's driving the comedy/tragedy. We're already living the tragedy. We already had whatever tragedies we had in our past. It's all about blending the comedy in the tragedy. I gave this set of riffs and stuff over to [Primus], and they completely reinvented it. I'm like, "So what do you think this song's about, Les?" He is like, "Pablo Escobar's hippos." "OK, well, you're fucked now because that's what it's about." [*Laughs*] So I wrote "Pablo's Hippos," because that's what gets me up in the morning — silly shit like that.

CLAYPOOL He sent me this track and he said, "This sounds Primus-y to me." And the first thing I thought was, it was like a weird, bent version of "My Sharona." Then we did our Primus thing to it, but it has this lofty "Pink Elephants on Parade" vibe to it. And so he's like, "I'm gonna write the lyrics now. What does this song sound like to you?" And it just popped in my head. I go, "Well, it sounds like Pablo Escobar's hippos," because I'd just seen this program on Pablo's hippos, so away he went. Now we have this song, and it's very cool. When do you get to write a song about Pablo Escobar's hippos?

KEENAN The music has to be there first. But if you don't have a little bit of a sense of humor and if you take yourself too seriously, it's not going to be any fun. Even if it's a technically perfect song.

MAYNARD, YOU'VE ACTUALLY WORKED WITH COMEDY AND COMEDIANS AND IMPROV. HOW HAS THAT FED INTO YOUR MUSIC?

KEENAN TOOL has always been a weird eccentric project. Before we went down a farther path, we used to have a lot of humor in there — but I feel like it kind of disappeared with the growth. So Puscifer came out of my need to express that side of things. All the stuff you see with Puscifer is still serious music, but there is just a natural unforced sense of humor that comes out in it. That stuff's always been in Puscifer because it's such an important outlet for not taking yourself too seriously, although taking the music very seriously.

CLAYPOOL Humor doesn't have to be silly. Stanley Kubrick made some of the most hilarious films ever, but it was very serious. And Terry Gilliam, same way. People think of humor oftentimes in music, and they go, "Oh, it's got to be goofball. It's got to be silly." Well, no, there's quite a bit of satire out there that has nothing to do with silliness — but is very humorous. With Puscifer, there's a lot of irony in there. There's a lot of darkness. There's a lot of that David Lynchian element that I find hilarious but is dark as fuck.

KEENAN Yeah. If you watch the *Twin Peaks* series and you're not laughing through portions of that in the middle of a murder mystery, you're dead. There's something wrong with you.

PRIMUS AND TOOL TOURED TOGETHER AROUND 2015. DID YOU GUYS SEE EACH OTHER A LOT IN THAT SITUATION?

CLAYPOOL There was a lot of spooning going on. We did some spooning.

KEENAN Or forking, as it were. Don't leave out the fork. The hard part of being out with these bands is that I like to have a little glass of wine, but I can't really do it day of show or before the show, or even the night before. If I know I have a couple days off, I might have something two nights before. I really have to pay attention to that. So it's a little frustrating being out with them. He and I are both making wine, wanting to have wine every night. But I just can't. So you're looking forward to those double-days off so you can actually have a little glass.

CLAYPOOL I have wine every night. [*Laughs*] Not before the show. I've had wine before a show and it just slows me down. I can't do shit. After the show, I have a little splash of Pinot. Ah, it's so good.

KEENAN Yeah, I agree. A little glass right after the show is fine, but I can't go, "Hey, we're gonna try a bunch of bottles and order some big piles of food." I can't do it on a school night.

I'VE SEEN, MANY TIMES, PERRY FARRELL FROM JANE'S ADDICTION DRINKING WINE FROM THE BOTTLE *ONSTAGE*.

CLAYPOOL That's cranberry juice.

KEENAN That's Perry. He's right there behind Keith Richards with, "How the fuck is that guy still walking?"

CLAYPOOL I remember going to Monsters of Rock back in the day at the Day on the Green [in Oakland, California], and there's Aerosmith up there chugging bottles of Jack Daniel's onstage. I don't know if that was Jack Daniel's, but it sure

was impressive to the 14-year-old kids standing out there in the throngs of people. But if I have a glass of wine before a gig, you're going to get a shitty gig, I'll tell you that. Or if I have a steak before a gig, it's terrible. It's just a lethargic boring-ass gig.

AFTER GROWING UP WATCHING PEOPLE LIKE KEITH RICHARDS IN ACTION, WAS THE ACTUAL REALITY OF BEING A BAND ON THE ROAD WHAT YOU THOUGHT IT WAS GOING TO BE LIKE?

KEENAN The "get in the van" phase was the honeymoon phase of touring. I'm very much a homebody, so it is really tough for me to be away from my house. Like everything, there's things that were, Oh, I expected that — and a lot more that I didn't expect. I'm finding now that I've kind of found my groove. Going out and doing theaters with Puscifer and doing large arenas with TOOL, my day doesn't change much — [in terms of] what I have to do to prep for a tour.

There's just things I've got to do to make sure at this age that can happen. But when you're in that van, you just seem invincible. You seem like you can do whatever you want, and you can still pull off the show. That changed quickly.

CLAYPOOL [*Laughs*] We were young and full of beans back then. Some of the funnest times I've had in my life were in the Odor Home, pulling a trailer after shows. Ler and I would sit up front with a beatbox between us and headphones listening to Pink Floyd stoned out of our minds. And we loved it. The early days going up the hill, it's so glorious. It's so fun. And then you see behind the scenes at Disneyland, so to speak. And it becomes less of that thing, but it becomes a different thing.

Now that we're 60, I find different things to enjoy about it. I remember my father saying when I was young, "Hey, this music thing's great, but learn a trade." I come from a long line of auto mechanics, and I've had a lot of trades and I've had a lot of really cool jobs. This is still the best fucking job I've ever had. It's amazing. But as you move through life, when it doesn't seem as shiny as it did at a certain point, you have to find new shiny elements within that. And one is doing this Triple P tour or the Sessanta. If it's exciting for us, it's going to translate to the audience.

THE IDEA OF HAVING MULTIPLE BANDS ONSTAGE THE WHOLE SHOW, WAS THAT JUST A CRAZY DREAM YOU HAD, MAYNARD?

KEENAN [In 2014] I wanted to do a big thing for my 50th birthday in L.A. with some L.A.-based bands. But I forgot that people have hang-ups and there's ego involved. I reached out to several bands to go, "Hey, let's do this thing," and I got one response from one of the bands and he went, "Why the fuck would you want to do that?" And I'm like, oh, OK. I guess I'll do this with A Perfect Circle, Failure and Puscifer — bands that wanted to do it. I don't know why the hell I wanted to do it, but it just felt like a thing to do.

FOR BOTH OF YOU, IMPROV IS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF THE CREATIVE PROCESS. HOW DOES SHARING A STAGE WITH ALL THESE CREATIVE PEOPLE LEAD TO THINGS THAT WOULDN'T OTHERWISE HAPPEN?

KEENAN You're just kind of living in that moment. Those things are happening in real time, and you can't force them. It's no fun to force it. So if it happens, it happens. And if it does happen, then it's probably going to be a pretty cool thing.

CLAYPOOL When we did the thing with Ween, we rehearsed the shit out of that thing. And yet there were still all these moments of spontaneity that were the magic golden nuggets. You're not going to get those every night. The planets are going to align some nights and some nights they aren't. But the talent that's in this one space at this one time is so strong that there's a huge safety net, so that even if we're all having a shitty day and we've all got fricking explosive diarrhea, there's a strong safety net there to be an amazing show.

KEENAN That's why I bring this group of people together because they are open to the spontaneity. They're not this rigid, "This is how I do the song and I have to be up front, or I have to be here." All that rigid shit just doesn't work with it. I have a lot of friends that are in incredible bands, but many of them — God bless 'em — they're rigid. They wouldn't be able to do this thing. So, the spontaneity is built in with this group of people.

> "You kind of wonder what you're going to put on your tombstone, and I narrowed it down to: 'Comedy first. Always.'"
> — Keenan

YOU EXPRESS A LITTLE BIT OF ALARM AT THE NUMBER 60. BUT THERE'S ARTISTS THAT YOU GREW UP LISTENING TO, LIKE THE ROLLING STONES, NOW WORKING INTO THEIR 80S. HOW DOES THAT FACTOR IN YOUR FUTURE?

KEENAN My father right now is in Helsinki. He's 85. He still cross-country skis competitively over there. It's inspiring to see the Rolling Stones out there still doing it, but it's more inspiring to see my dad getting on a plane and going to Helsinki to ski. That to me is more of an inspiration than Keith Richards getting transfusions.

CLAYPOOL When all is said and done, I'm a fucking bass player. I've been very fortunate to play with some amazing players and one of them being [Parliament-Funkadelic keyboardist] Bernie Worrell. He was one of the most amazing musicians I've ever played with and befriended. He just had all this magic and experience — all this salt, I would say — that came out of his fingers on everything that he played. I see these guys, whether it's someone like Bernie or [the Grateful Dead's] Bob Weir, these guys that just go and go and go and they do what they do every day because they love it. I'm going to go do a gig as long as I can go do a gig, just because that's what I'm best at. And it pays the old mortgage.

AFTER THE CELEBRATION OF SESSANTA, WHAT PLANS DO YOU HAVE ON THE HORIZON?

KEENAN I've got three bands that need to write songs, so I'm going to be doing that. But I'm also expanding out in Arizona, opening up a fried chicken place in Cottonwood. When it comes to winemaking and growing our own grapes, we're planting vineyards and strapping in for four or five years of waiting to see what's going to happen there. That's the one that takes the most planning and patience. But other than that, the path is kind of laid out for you. Like Les said, he's a bass player. I'm a singer, I've got to write songs. That's what I do. So the next year and a half to me is writing songs I've got to write. ⓡ

TIM CADIENTE

Keenan and Puscifer's Carina Round performing on the Sessanta tour, Boch Center at Wang Theatre, Boston, April 3rd, 2024

KERRY KING

The thrash icon ignites his second act with an explosive debut solo album – but he's not ready to shut the door on Slayer just yet

TEXT **Dan Epstein**
PHOTOGRAPHY **Jimmy Hubbard**

IT'S A TOURIST ATTRACTION NOW,

but 150 years or so ago, New York City's South Street Seaport was the busiest port in the world. Thousands of commercial shipping vessels from around the globe docked there annually to deliver their cargo and load up for the next voyage, and the nearby saloons were packed day and night with some of the roughest characters imaginable — sailors, stevedores and longshoremen sporting tattoos, earrings, scraggly beards, and skin as leathered as their dispositions from toiling year-round in the sun, wind, rain and snow.

A few of those old Seaport saloon locations are still functioning watering holes. Though they've all long since been cleaned up to appeal to out-of-towners and local workers from the adjacent financial district, and currently bear little resemblance to the notorious dens of iniquity and full-scale drunkenness that they once were. But on this snowy January afternoon, there's a guy sitting at a back table in one of those bars who looks like he'd have fit right in here a century and a half ago. Scraggly beard and earrings? Check. Shaven, tattooed skull? Check. Fearsome scowl? Check. Several shots of hi-octane alcohol lined up in front of him? Also check.

This fierce-looking dude isn't exactly killing time between voyages, however; a resident of New York City since late 2021, Kerry King has become a regular at this particular establishment, which is a fairly easy walk from the Tribeca apartment he shares with Ayesha, his wife of 20 years, and their menagerie of rescue dogs and cats. "My wife's from here, and she wanted to come back," he explains of their relocation from Las Vegas. "We moved out here two years ago, the weekend after Thanksgiving, but I'm still kind of getting to know it. I'd been to New York a billion times, but never long enough to worry about what part was what. When we started looking for places, I didn't know the Upper West Side from the Upper East Side."

The founding Slayer guitarist and songwriter has spent the last couple years familiarizing himself with the Big Apple's charms — "I walk everywhere, or take the subway," he says — including making several trips with Ayesha to the Metropolitan Opera. "She's a big opera fan," he says with a shrug. "I like it, but I always fall asleep trying to read along with the lyric translations." But as much as he loves the city, he's really looking forward to hitting the road this spring with his new band in support of *From Hell I Rise*, his long-awaited solo debut, which drops this May. "I just finished [listening to] the last song as I was walking up to the door," he says, beaming. "I hadn't listened to it in a while, but you know what? I love it. It's still killer. I'm *very* happy… and it still feels like we finished it yesterday."

In fact, *From Hell I Rise* — a blistering 13-song album produced by Josh Wilbur (Lamb of God, Trivium) and featuring Death Angel vocalist Mark Osegueda, former Machine Head lead guitarist Phil Demmel, Hellyeah bassist Kyle Sanders, and longtime Slayer drummer Paul Bostaph — has actually been sitting in the can since last June, and it has roots stretching all the way back to *Repentless*, the 2015 album that turned out to be Slayer's final studio effort. "I already had 'Rage' and 'From Hell I Rise,' two tracks on the new album, left over from *Repentless*," King says. "Those songs were originally recorded for that album, but I just didn't get the performance I wanted out of them. So rather than put them out half-assedly, if that's a word, I decided I was gonna keep them for the next Slayer record and try recording them again. But when it turned out that there wasn't going to *be* another Slayer record, they became *my* stuff."

Slayer — the storied and massively influential thrash-metal band King co-founded in 1981 with vocalist-bassist Tom Araya, drummer Dave Lombardo and late guitarist Jeff Hanneman — announced in January 2018 that they would be embarking on one final world tour and then "move on," a decision largely driven by Araya's desire to retire from the road. On November 30th, 2019, at the Forum in Inglewood, California, Slayer played the final show of that run. Nearly five years later, the band will reunite its most recent lineup — featuring Araya, King, Exodus guitarist Gary Holt and longtime Slayer drummer Paul Bostaph — for three festival appearances this fall, at Chicago's Riot Fest on September 22nd, Louisville, Kentucky's Louder Than Life five days later and Sacramento, California's Aftershock on October 10th (dates that weren't announced at the time of our original interview with King). But there are no plans for a full-fledged return to action for Slayer. Which means that King is still very much in need of launching a new chapter in his career; consider the pointedly titled *From Hell I Rise* the opening passage.

"I had every intention of making another Slayer record," King says, looking back at the origins of the album. "Until Tom was doing an interview with some publication, and they asked him about the next Slayer album. He said something like, 'I don't know, I gotta talk to Kerry before we start working on the next record.' And that's what he wanted to talk to me about: He had no intention of doing another record.

"And when I found that out," he continues, "of course I'm hurt, first and foremost. Second, I'm like, 'I got a lot of work to do.' Third, I'm like, 'I've just gotta play my gig as best I can every night [on the final tour] and prepare to move on.' And fourth, I was like, 'OK, all these songs that I'd been writing for Slayer? Now they're just mine.'"

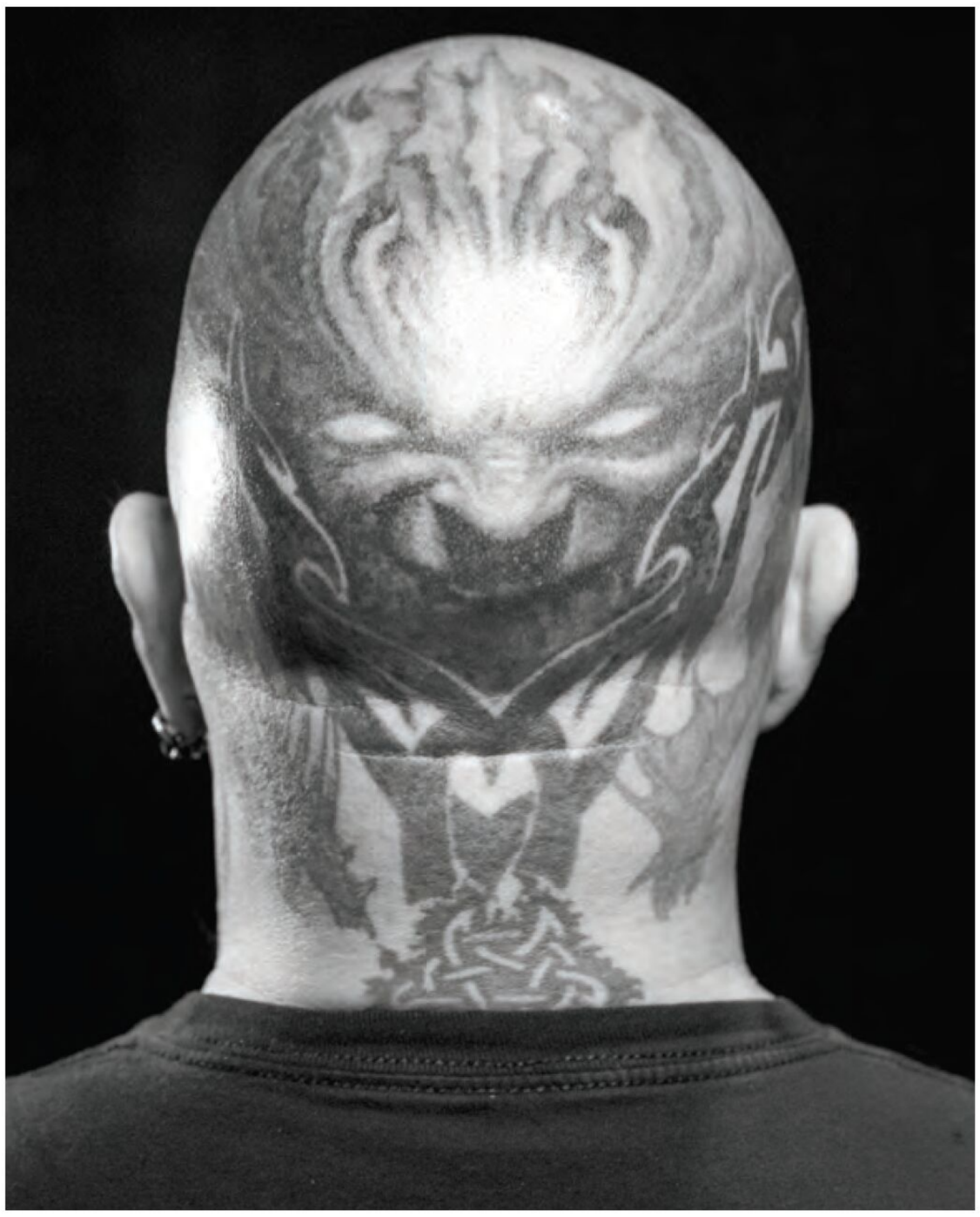
In a late 2022 interview with *Metal Hammer*, King called Slayer's retirement from touring "premature," and described the band's 18-month farewell trek as a "bummer." Today, he seems to view the subject with a little more equanimity, in part because he's so stoked about *From Hell I Rise*. "I mean, there's something to be said for going out on top, and I'm happy to be a part of that," he says. "I feel like Peyton Manning — I won the Super Bowl and I quit. But was I done? Absolutely not. If I was, I wouldn't have this great record sitting in front of me. Would this have been the next Slayer record? Probably, though there's a couple of things on this that I might not have put on the next Slayer record. It's not like I ever felt like I had blinders on in Slayer, and I never felt pigeonholed in Slayer; but once you take the Slayer moniker away, my brain doesn't feel as restrained."

LIGHTING: JASON GOODRICH; LOCATION: COURTESY OF SAINT VITUS BAR

(from left) Kyle Sanders, Kerry King, Phil Demmel, Mark Osegueda and Paul Bostaph

JIM LOUVAU

"I never felt pigeonholed in Slayer — but once you take the Slayer moniker away, my brain doesn't feel as restrained."
— Kerry King



STRIKING OUT ON ONE'S OWN AFTER FOUR DECADES IN ONE OF THE MOST ICONIC metal bands of all time is no easy task, of course. Mindful of the shadow that Slayer would inevitably cast over his next move, King put a considerable amount of thought into assembling *From Hell I Rise* — particularly in selecting the band that would play on the record and tour to support it.

"There was no way I was going to do this without Paul Bostaph," he says. "He's really fantastic; and I think a little bit of an overlooked thrash drummer. Lombardo's a great player. I can never ever take that away from Dave. But Paul works hard every second to be the best drummer he can be. He's very open to direction. He thinks about going through a song once, twice, 10 times before he plays it. He's a perfectionist."

King's first choice on bass was Kyle Sanders, brother of Mastodon bassist Troy and former member of Bloodsimple and Hellyeah. "I knew Kyle from the Mayhem Festival we did together, and we'd got on great, and I knew I wanted him to be my guy," King recalls. "But I had to play my hand with him a lot earlier than I wanted to. Vince [Vinnie Paul] up and quit on us in 2018, and I didn't want to offer him the gig anywhere near Vince dying, because that's just inappropriate. But I was on the phone with Kyle before Hellyeah did their final tour, just checking in to see how he was, and I said, 'I don't want to cloud what you're doing, but when 2020 rolls around, I got something you're probably gonna be interested in.' And he was like, 'I hear you loud and clear.'"

The next piece of the puzzle for King was Phil Demmel, who had stepped in as a last-minute substitute for Gary Holt for the last four dates of Slayer's final European tour. "When Phil came out for those European shows, all he could talk about was that he *knew* I was going on after this — and he was like, 'I wanna be part of your future.' And he wasn't having anything less!

"At that point I was probably still in the Holt camp, as far as having him in my next band," he continues. "But I started to realize that the more pieces I take from Slayer, the more it's gonna be called 'Slayer Lite.' I mean, of course it's gonna sound like Slayer; I wrote 90 percent of the last record. But if I take less with me from Slayer, there'll be less for people to stand on, as far as making lazy comparisons. If I had to do Slayer over again after Hanneman [*who died in 2013*], 110 times out of a 100, I would pick Gary Holt. He was the right guy. But the perception of people, it weighs on me, and I don't want to deal with that.

"I love Gary. He's a great player. But I already had my one dude from Slayer I was definitely keeping. And Phil had only played four gigs with Slayer, so that comparison wasn't going to be there; also, he impressed the fuck out of me when he came out to do those Europe gigs. It was just a couple of days after his Machine Head tour had ended, and he learned 18 or 20 of our songs on short notice. He also had to learn our stage tempos, and where the pyro was. If Judas Priest had asked me to come out in four days and figure all that out, I couldn't have done it. But Phil did it for us."

When word began circulating in the metal world that King was putting together a new band, few vocalists stepped forward to offer their services. "Maybe they thought I already had somebody," King reflects, "or maybe they didn't think that they could handle the speedy vocals. I definitely have some tongue twisters in my lyrics, but I knew Mark could do it. I've known him forever, but we got closer in the mid-2010s when Death Angel opened for us on *Repentless*. He's a fun guy and a great singer. But I didn't tell him until about a year ago that he had the gig;

Slayer performing at Madison Square Garden, New York City, 2019

I wanted to kind of test out his coachability, to make sure he wasn't a nightmare to work with, which he was not. And it turned out he had a whole other level of vocals that none of us knew about.

"'Residue' was the second song from the new album that he sang on, and he just went completely nuts on it. I walked in and was like, 'Is this sustainable? Because if this is just [you] on record, I don't wanna go out there and present something that's not reproduceable live. You think you can do this five nights a week?' And he's like, 'Yeah, I do.' And then he started *really* belting it out on 'Crucifixation' and 'Where I Reign,' and I was like, 'OK, I believe you!'"

Musically or lyrically, *From Hell I Rise* doesn't deviate particularly far from the template Slayer has laid down in the past — but the anger coursing through the album, and especially through tracks like "Rage," "Residue," "Toxic" and "Two Fists," all feels very immediate. "I wrote the lyrics to 'Toxic' and 'Residue' around the time that *Roe v. Wade* got overturned," King recalls. "'Toxic' is vague enough where it can be about any government because everybody all over the world has problems with their government. But one of the lines in that song is 'hide behind the cloak' — and that, to me, referred to how every one of Trump's Supreme Court judges lied to get their job. If you don't want to believe that, look it up. I watched every one of them get nominated, and I watched every one of them lie about *Roe v. Wade* to get their gig. These are the people judging my future. And don't get me started on Clarence Thomas..."

"'Rage' is about all the political nonsense that happened in Trump's presidency," he continues, "like when he went to take a picture holding a Bible in front of the church during the George Floyd protests. Like, what the hell, dude? I mean, I'm not here to tell you what to choose. I'm here to point out things — maybe things you don't know, or things maybe you didn't think of, or you don't see because of the nightmare of nonsense people spew out at you. That's what I do with religion too. It's not my job to tell you to like God, like the Devil or like atheism. But I've given myself this job to point things out that maybe you don't think about when other things are force-fed down your throat."

But despite the rage seething through *From Hell I Rise*, the album radiates the unmistakable vibe of musicians having an absolute blast. "We all just had the best time working together on the record," exults King. "Everybody was just fired up and really excited about the project, and I think the final product really says that; it's firing on every cylinder, for sure. I remember I went up to Paul Bostaph on like day three in the studio, and I was like, 'You know what? This is fun!'"

Asked when the last time was that he felt a similar sense of fun during a Slayer recording session, King doesn't miss a beat. "Eighties," he says. "But you know,

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King, Saint Vitus Bar, Brooklyn, New York, 2024

when you're in a project for a long time, people change their opinions; we worked hard to be who we were, so you've gotta give and take. But I like how fun this is; I like just seeing people smiling, and people saying, 'You want me to do it again? Let's do it again!' I think it's a great piece of work, and a natural progression from Slayer. And it definitely fills a void."

And speaking of doing it again… when *Revolver* asked King about the likelihood of a reunion tour during our January interview, this is what he had to say: "I have not slammed the door on Slayer playing. I am pretty sure Slayer will never tour again, and I can pretty much guarantee Slayer will never make another record."

He adds, "Did we retire? Absolutely — we retired from touring. Those chains will never be worn again. Am I gonna make new chains? Yeah, probably." He laughs. "Because I don't know what to wear without 'em."

A MONTH AFTER OUR CONVERSATION, THE CAT IS OUT OF THE BAG: THE SLAYER reunion is official. So, of course, we need to go back to King and ask if he'd actually known about these reunion dates the whole time.

"If you ask promoters, they're going to have another answer," he replies. "If you ask booking agents, they'll probably have a third answer. But to me, it kind of came out of nowhere. Have we been getting offers the past few years? Yeah, we turn down offers every year, probably every month of every year. These three festivals are right around the five-year anniversary of our last tour, which I thought was kind of cool. So, I thought this might be the right time to test the water. It will be great to play for the fans again."

Considering that King has numerous festival dates of his own coming up this summer, along with nearly six weeks supporting Lamb of God and Mastodon on the Ashes of Leviathan tour, we were curious to know if he thought that the impending Slayer dates would upstage his new album and the serious roadwork that he and his band are putting into it.

"Well, time will tell, and my answer would be, 'hopefully not,'" he says. "The funny thing is, it never occurred to me until the day the Slayer announcement came, but Demmel said, 'Dude, is this real?' And I'm like, 'It's just a few weekends and that's it.' Of course, Paul knew. But I didn't tell Phil, I didn't tell Kyle and didn't tell Mark — and I said to the guys, 'There's no master plan here.' I didn't want anybody to start getting cold feet. I said, 'This is a little moment in time, and yeah, Kerry King is going to be touring, you know, hopefully later in the year, as well. But Slayer is an entity and I'm just a person.' But hopefully, we drive on with the solo project."

All of which, of course, begs the question: If the Slayer dates feel great, and Araya suggests getting the band back together in the studio to make another album, would King consider it? "I'll stick my hand in the bucket for a couple shows," he says, "but I just started my new career, and my career is just taking off. I'm very excited for the guys in the band to actually be able to see something coming of their efforts. And we've got material towards record two, already. And that's going to be under the Kerry King moniker, for sure.

"The wait for that album won't be long," he adds. "There won't be no five-year gap. I ain't got time for that, dude. I'm getting old. This is the point of my life where I ain't got time to fuck around." Ⓡ

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KNOCKED LOOSE
Fortitude Tour

KNOCKED LOOSE

The Kentucky crew are poised to become the biggest band in hardcore. Can they step up without pulling their punches?

TEXT **Eli Enis**
PHOTGRAPHY **Brock Fetch and Ed Mason**

KNOCKED LOOSE ARE PLAYING, AND THE ROOM IS GOING BUCK-WILD.

People are scrambling onstage and front-flipping off like bullfrogs at a pond's edge. Crowd-surfers are crawling atop the maw of screaming fans, all of them battling for a chance to grab the mic when frontman Bryan Garris leans down to pass it off. The mosh pit is pandemonium, a kinetic flurry of circle-pitters and arm-swingers. And as is custom at Knocked Loose shows, when Garris barks "*arf-arf*" before the ass-beating breakdown in "Counting Worms," the whole venue erupts like a dog kennel at dinner time.

That could describe any one of Knocked Loose's greatest, most intimate performances from over the last 10 years — and it does. Except in this case, the band weren't headlining a 1,500-capacity club or even rocking a marquee hardcore festival. All of that mayhem went down at Coachella, the California cool-kid retreat where Knocked Loose whipped up a frenzy while Billie Eilish watched from the side stage, and Frank Ocean headlined the 2023 festival later that night.

"Coachella was, as far as the vibe of the show, one of the most hardcore sets I've ever played," guitarist Isaac Hale tells *Revolver* without a whiff of hyperbole. "It had the stage dives; it had no difference between us and the crowd; it had the call and response; it had the moshing. It had everything."

Knocked Loose weren't the first hardcore band to infiltrate the pastel-pink expo of pop and rap that is Coachella: Trash Talk, Code Orange and Turnstile have all preceded them as the festival's token pit-starters. But none of their sets

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SHOWSEC

Knocked Loose, (from left) Bryan Garris, Nicko Calderon, Kevin Otten, Kevin Kaine and Isaac Hale

rivaled the magnitude and intensity of Knocked Loose's crowd, which underscores just how far the Louisville, Kentucky, band have come over the last decade. In the 2010s they ascended from Midwest breakouts to genre rulers in five years' time. In the early 2020s, they scaled up to touring arenas with Bring Me the Horizon, Motionless in White and $uicideboy$, expanding their empire beyond hardcore's borders. Now, their fanbase boasts everyone from Avenged Sevenfold frontman M. Shadows to Disney pop star Demi Lovato, who, in 2023, said that she'd love to collaborate with Knocked Loose on a song. This spring, they'll be in the driver's seat, headlining their own sold-out shows in 3,500-cap rooms across the United States.

All of these feats would be bewildering for any hardcore band; over its 40-year history, the DIY-minded subculture has produced only a handful of bands who've attained Knocked Loose's degree of popularity: Hatebreed, Biohazard and Turnstile being the main three. However, the hype is especially remarkable considering how unrelentingly heavy Knocked Loose remain. The Louisville crew still don't have a single clean vocal in their repertoire, and they continue to churn out savage breakdown after savage breakdown. Many extreme bands lighten up with age, but Knocked Loose are only getting heavier. They want to be the biggest hardcore band in the world — to put "the intensity of a Knocked Loose show in front of as many new ears as possible," Hale says. But can they do it without compromising the furious sound that brought them this far?

"I want people to see the crowds that we're playing to," Hale says with a proud smirk, "and then hear our music and be like, 'How in the fuck are they doing this?'"

The band's new album, *You Won't Go Before You're Supposed To*, only makes that question more flummoxing. It contains mosh parts that are genuinely terrifying and guitar riffs that approach death-metal levels of face-mauling intensity. Even with a couple vocal features from big-name guests who reside outside of hardcore — Motionless in White's Chris Motionless and Poppy — there's not a single clean chorus to be heard throughout its ballistic 10-song tracklist. Historically, when hardcore scene leaders reach album number three, the itch to expand melodically becomes irresistible: See Hatebreed's sleek *The Rise of Brutality*, Earth Crisis' nu-metally *Breed the Killers* and even Turnstile's resplendently bubbly *Glow On*. The door was open for Knocked Loose to sand down some of their caustic edges in a bid to broaden their appeal — but they were very intentional about doing the exact opposite.

"I know that we didn't compromise at all," Hale says of the new record's creative direction. "And we could have. But we didn't."

Indeed, nothing about *You Won't Go...* makes Knocked Loose's sound any more palatable to the masses. If anything, the quintet — Garris, Hale, rhythm guitarist Nicko Calderon, bassist Kevin Otten and drummer Kevin Kaine — are only becoming more abrasive as they evolve, experimenting with stranger rhythms, screechier guitar dissonance and, for Garris' part, even more intensely blood-curdling screams. The band spent years working on this batch of songs, riddled with doubt and anxiety that they wouldn't be able to surpass their 2021 EP/mini-movie *A Tear in the Fabric of Life*, which shattered the high expectations set by their instant-classic sophomore album, 2019's *A Different Shade of Blue*.

"I feel like bands like us aren't supposed to make three albums," Garris muses during a separate chat. "How many breakdowns can you write?"

Whatever the limit is, Knocked Loose have been raising it since they formed the band as teenagers

OPENING SPREAD AND PREVIOUS PAGE: ED MASON; THIS PAGE: BROCK FETCH

"Hardcore isn't for everyone, but it's for anyone. I think everyone should be subjected to hardcore because it's the most exciting and passionate music in the world."
— Isaac Hale

in 2013. A lot has changed since then. Only three of their members still live in Louisville (Garris is now in Los Angeles and Otten's in Colorado Springs) — the city whose DIY hardcore scene they grew out of and, at first, never expected to leave. They wrote their gnarly debut EP, 2014's *Pop Culture*, without thinking that anyone would ever hear it. Garris was a full-time college student at the time. And despite his passion for hardcore burning bright enough to ignite his family's interest — he and his brother Trey are in XweaponX (along with Hale), while his other brother Dallas played in Street Rat and guested on Knocked Loose's "The Rain" — Garris initially had no desire to make Knocked Loose more than a hobby. Hale, on the other hand, always had grander musical ambitions.

"I was the one that had always wanted to do it for a living. That's been my plan since I was a kid." says Hale, who also plays in the straight-edge band Inclination and produces for bands including Wristmeetrazor and SeeYouSpaceCowboy.

Once *Pop Culture* picked up an unexpected buzz on the strength of its ferocious sound and Garris' confessional lyrics ("All my friends have problems with their selves/We don't talk about it, nothing helps," he shrieks during the runaway underground hit "All My Friends") it gave them an incentive to tour beyond the confines of Oldham County. Their momentum has been rapidly growing ever since, and Garris has put his college degree on indefinite hiatus. As Hale puts it, they've been going "straight, no brakes" since their 2016 album *Laugh Tracks*, which made them one of hardcore's fastest-rising acts and scored them crucial support tours with Every Time I Die and the Acacia Strain.

By 2019, they were a headlining force unto themselves, and *A Different Shade of Blue* was met with resounding praise. Five years onward, the album stands as a landmark of modern hardcore, a crucial entry point for a whole generation of hardcore fans who killed their first crowd in a Knocked Loose pit. COVID-19 could've snuffed their flame, like it did to many of their peer bands, but Knocked Loose buckled down and wrote *A Tear in the Fabric of Life*, which boasted their most relentlessly heavy music yet. It was also accompanied by their most ambitious project: a 20-minute animated short film that visualized all six of the skull-cracking songs.

The band felt it was their crowning achievement, but they weren't sure if their fans would get it. Ultimately, the EP and movie were a hit, and Knocked Loose emerged from lockdown more popular than ever. But the success came with a catch: They were so proud of *A Tear in the Fabric of Life* that they weren't sure where to go next.

"How do we top something that feels like we just completely knocked it out of the park?" Hale says of the stress they felt going into *You Won't Go Before You're Supposed To*.

That tension is baked into the whole affair. The album's loquacious title is, word-for-word, a comment that a total stranger told Garris when he was confiding in her about his ever-worsening flight anxiety before takeoff. The casual confidence of the airplane passenger's tone — the message being that he won't die until his fate has been fulfilled — struck a chord with Garris, who's wrestled with themes of religion, death and mental health throughout Knocked Loose's whole career. Taken together with songs like "Blinding Faith" — a haunting account of religious trauma in which Garris howls "I deny the church" — and the spooky album cover — depicting a woman standing before a giant glowing cross, evoking an

BROCK FETCH

A24 horror film like *Hereditary — You Won't Go Before You're Supposed To* is Knocked Loose's most conceptually coherent project to date.

Tying together all those threads took time. One thing that's remained constant since the band's house-show days is their step-by-step ethos. There's never been a grand plan for how they approach the full-time job they more or less fell into, but they credit their success to constantly outdoing themselves and never resting on their laurels. That's easier said than done.

"We don't think about long-term goals," Hale says. "We're always just like, OK, well we did that, how can we one-up that?"

Compared to previous albums, writing was an arduous process as the band struggled to meet their own standards. They ultimately penned 30 tracks that were potential candidates for *You Won't Go...*, which they slashed down to the record's final 10. "I definitely went into this process with a lot of anxiety," Garris says. "In a lot of ways, this was definitely the hardest record I've ever created."

Knocked Loose set their creative bar sky-high, but they don't have their heads in the clouds. They're acutely aware of how they're perceived by the hardcore scene they emerged from, and their mission with this record was to stay true to the culture and push their sound as far as it could go without sacrificing any of the no-holds-barred intensity that got them to this point in the first place. The quandary of adding clean-sung vocals to the mix, a contentious sonic tweak for breakdown-based bands of Knocked Loose's caliber, was a real internal discussion within the group.

"We're very aware of the, 'Oh, they introduced cleans for the first time,'" Hale says of the common 'core trope. He and his bandmates would literally pose the question to each other as if they were fans: "Do we want cleans in a Knocked Loose song yet [that are] sung by us? No, we wouldn't," they ultimately decided.

Hale continues, "Everyone in Knocked Loose fucking loves the band Knocked Loose. We approach it from a fan's perspective a lot of the time. It's like, What do we like about the band? What do we want to stay the same and what do we want to evolve?"

A change in producers felt right. The band recorded their first two albums and *A Tear in the Fabric of Life* with hardcore boardsmith Will Putney, of Fit for an Autopsy and Better Lovers fame. After using Drew Fulk's services for their pair of 2023 songs, the *Upon Loss Singles*, Knocked Loose hired the L.A. producer full-time for this job. Fulk has worked with everyone from Ice Nine Kills to Lil Wayne, and the band thought his all-encompassing ear would lend itself to the knottier, more eclectic vibe they wanted *You Won't Go...* to have.

Fulk's handiwork on the final product sounds a little shinier than past Knocked Loose albums, but it really only accentuates the record's whiplash-inducing soundscape. The band's most experimental song yet, "Suffocate," features an apoplectic verse from Poppy, the genre-hopping juggernaut whose own catalog flits between scabrous metal and sensuous pop. Having her inimitable vocals on the track gave Knocked Loose the leeway to flex their creative muscles, cutting up her vocals to jarring effect, and including what Hale calls a "reggaeton beat" during one of its off-kilter breakdowns. Chris Motionless, frontman of arena-ruling metalcore titans Motionless in White, makes an appearance on "Slaughterhouse 2," a cheekily titled sequel to the MIW track Garris guested on in 2022. (Garris is no stranger to wide-ranging collabs: from adding vocal fire on Dying Wish's raging "Enemies in Red" to his surprising onstage appearance at Lollapalooza 2023 with 30 Seconds to Mars to perform "The Kill").

Like the first "Slaughterhouse," it's an amazingly natural pairing that highlights the two band's creative kinship. They're an odd couple both sonically and aesthetically — MIW being makeup-wearing metalcore goths with huge choruses, and Knocked Loose being, well, not that — but they've become close compatriots in recent years. MIW invited Knocked Loose to open for their 2023 tour, hoisting the budding stars into arenas on a nightly basis, where they were forced to unleash their knuckle-dragging hardcore in giant rooms where stage-dives and mic-grabs are a no-go. Learning how to contend in those spaces was an instructive experience for the band, especially Garris, who was mesmerized by the scope of MIW's stage show — a dizzying display of fire, dancers and other eye-popping visuals. It got the singer thinking: "What's Knocked Loose's version of that?"

"What can we do to expand what Knocked Loose is without changing what Knocked Loose is?" Garris ruminates. "Motionless in White had dancers. I don't think that it would make sense for Knocked Loose to have dancers, but I look at that and I'm like, what's next production-wise?"

These are decisions that few hardcore bands in the genre's history have ever had to make. Hatebreed and Biohazard are two comparable antecedents to Knocked Loose's trajectory, but neither of them are as musically malicious as the Kentucky boys. Where Hatebreed and Biohazard write anthemic songs that naturally translate into full-room shout-alongs, Knocked Loose unleash a relentlessly aggressive sound — punctuated by Garris' banshee screams — that is designed for the fist-swings and front-flips that small-room hardcore shows facilitate.

Accepting that they've literally outgrown the no-barricade spaces they made their bones playing was a "hard truth to swallow" for the band, Garris says.

"There's been so many days on tour where we show up to a room and there's a barricade," he recounts. "And me, our tour manager and Isaac are just arguing about this barricade, sometimes [getting] heated in the face of security."

More than anything, Knocked Loose want to ensure that the all-thrills energy of their live shows doesn't suffer as they continue to grow. In addition to gleaning advice on how to work a big room from their hardcore elders in Terror, they're looking beyond hardcore for inspiration. Seeing how an extreme-metal band like Meshuggah play devastating music in blockbuster venues has been a helpful guide.

"Meshuggah are a very big inspiration to us," Garris says. "You watch their show and there's so much going on that the members don't even have to move."

As Knocked Loose's upward mobility in the heavy-music industry has increased, so has — unsurprisingly — their fair share of haters. There's always been a vocal cadre within hardcore who believe bands from that world shouldn't even be allowed to get as big as Knocked Loose, and if they do, then it means that they must've watered down their identity to get there. Knocked Loose are an easy target for that kind of cynicism — literally. The retail giant Target has an exclusive vinyl variant of *You Won't Go Before You're Supposed To*.

Their commercial success is undeniable at this point, but it's not coming at a creative cost — their sound is heavier than ever. It's a particular point of pride for Hale to hear people say, "They keep getting bigger but there's no selling out." He understands where the skeptics are coming from when they view hardcore bands playing Coachella as antithetical to the subculture's anti-establishment ethos. But he sees it differently. Knocked Loose didn't use hardcore as a stepladder to get where they are — they remain connected to the scene and view themselves as ambassadors of the mosh who are out to recruit the next generation who'll help keep this thing alive.

"I would say that hardcore isn't for *everyone*, but it's for *anyone*," Hale says, dropping wisdom like the Confucius of crowd-kills. "Even if it's someone that just listens to Playboi Carti or indie artists, I think everyone should be subjected to hardcore music, punk rock music, metal music — because I think it's the most exciting and passionate music in the world."

And they'll do so while staying true to their skull-crushing selves. If the normies don't like it, so be it. That's cool with Knocked Loose, too. "We can either scare them or get them into it," Hale says. "And we're fine with both." R

BROCK FETCH

Rob Halford answers our readers' most burning questions

JUDAS

TEXT **J. Bennett**
PHOTOGRAPHY **Travis Shinn**

PRIEST

With Age Comes WISDOM.

The saying might be a dusty/rusty/trusty chestnut that old folks haul out when they want to feel superior to their younger, more flexible counterparts. But it's also very true. And it's just one of the messages behind Judas Priest's recently released nineteenth studio album, *Invincible Shield*. "It's part of the journey I'm on, and that all of us are on as we move through life," Priest's iconic frontman Rob Halford says. "We gain wisdom and knowledge and perspective that's way more sensible than you were when you were 15 or 20 years old."

Halford ought to know. In 2023, the legendary Metal God marked 50 years with Judas Priest. In January 2024, he celebrated 38 years of sobriety. Later this summer, he'll ring in his 73rd birthday. Of course, this is the same man who wrote the lyrics to "You Don't Have to Be Old to Be Wise" on Priest's 1980 breakthrough album, *British Steel,* so there must be another reason why some of the songs on *Invincible Shield* — like "Escape from Reality," "Crown of Horns" and lead single "Panic Attack" — are more personal than usual.

"I don't know whether it's linked to my day-to-day sobriety," Halford tells *Revolver* via Zoom from his home in Phoenix, Arizona, where a giant banner featuring the *Invincible Shield* cover art hangs on the wall behind him. "Maybe that's got something to do with it. The one day at a time thing — I'm always working on that. But this isn't a Rob Halford solo album. All of these songs relate to Judas Priest and how all of us may have felt. As importantly, when fans hear the words to a song like 'Escape From Reality,' which is about wishing you could turn back time and fix your mistakes, they'll go, 'Yeah, that's me.'"

Other *Invincible Shield* tracks, like "Devil in Disguise," are decidedly political — which is unusual for Priest. "Where I was 20 years ago, I wasn't the least bit concerned about politics," Halford explains. "Do young metalheads really wanna hear about the references I'm making to this person in 'Devil in Disguise'? Probably not. However, the devil in disguise can take many forms. It doesn't have to stick out like a protest song. I love protest songs — I'm the world's biggest Rage Against the Machine fan — but with Priest, we try to steer away from that. But as I've become older, I've become a lot more outspoken. Now, I don't give a fuck."

If *Invincible Shield* has an overarching theme, it's the staying power of Judas Priest, their fans, and heavy metal in general. It's an idea that's especially heartfelt for Halford, who became the first openly gay metal icon in 1998, when the metal community was even less open-minded than it is today. Of course, that was also the moment that his famous leather-daddy look took on a whole new meaning.

"When I walk out onstage later this year, at age 73, dressed the way I do, that's real, man," he says of Priest's *Invisible Shield* tour, which kicks off this spring in the U.S. before heading to European stages this summer. "There's so much conviction within that whole experience that it has formed its own invincible shield. It's impossible to destroy. It's this permanent expression of what metal is about, who we are as a band, and who our fans are. Internally, we all have our own invincible shields. We all have this power that doesn't get released until a specific moment. Externally, we have the battle vests, the leather, the studs, the rings, the whips, the chains, the handcuffs, the bike — it's all the invincible shield of heavy metal."

Sadly, the members of Judas Priest aren't really invincible. Bassist Ian Hill is 73. Drummer Scott Travis is 62. The band's elder statesman, 76-year-old guitarist Glenn Tipton, suffers from Parkinson's disease and has only appeared onstage occasionally in recent years. Guitarist Richie Faulkner, who is by far the youngest member of Priest at 44, suffered an aortic aneurysm onstage in September of 2021, which he survived thanks to a 10-plus hour emergency surgery during which pieces of his heart were replaced with mechanical parts. Thankfully, he returned to the stage with Priest in October of 2023.

"I have to take medication every day for the rest of my life, but I consider myself very fortunate," Faulkner

PHOTO ASSISTANT: BRIAN ELIOFF

Judas Priest performing at the OVO Hydro, Glasgow, 2024

tells *Revolver*. "Some people are dealing with things a lot more challenging than I am. I have to watch my diet and get regular checkups, but my support system at home is fantastic, and the compassion and support from the fans was overwhelming. I can only thank everyone for their messages as it really helped the healing process."

Both Tipton and Faulkner were heavily involved in the making of *Invincible Shield*, though Tipton only physically played on four songs. "His guitar playing has been limited by Parkinson's, but his input for this album has been indelible," Halford says. "He's been hands-on every step of the way. His overview of the arrangements, the lyrics, the production, the mixing — everything — is there with us."

Tipton appeared onstage with Priest at the Power Trip festival in Indio, California, last October (the same show as Faulkner's return) to play the three-song encore of "Metal Gods," "Breaking the Law" and "Living After Midnight." "We don't know if that will be the last time you'll see him onstage," Halford laments. "With Parkinson's, one day you're totally able to do whatever you want, and the next day you're being crushed by it. But again, all of that striving and never giving up, that invincible shield that is part of the metal spirit, is very much a part of Glenn Tipton."

All told, *Invincible Shield* is a worthy follow-up to 2018's *Firepower*, an album beloved by fans and critics alike. It's unheard of for a 50-year-old band to be writing songs this good this late in the game, but that's exactly what's happening. "After *Firepower*, there was a sense that you've got to go one more step up the ladder," Halford says. "Otherwise, what's the point of making a new record? It was very much, 'We're gonna go bigger, we're gonna go louder, we're gonna go stronger.'"

In the spirit of invincibility — and going big — Halford wasn't shy when answering *Revolver* readers' most burning questions.

IF YOU HAD TO PLAY JUST ONE JUDAS PRIEST SONG FOR SOMEONE WHO'S NEVER HEARD THE BAND BEFORE, WHICH SONG WOULD IT BE, AND WHY? — Kerry Dickens My gut takes me to "Victim of Changes" [from 1976's *Sad Wings of Destiny*] every time. It has all the elements and components that heavy metal, in its truest sense, is all about. It starts with the dual guitars, and Priest are the innovators of bringing dual guitars into metal. You've got the crushing riff, those first few vocal phrases, the breakdown where it pulls back and gets quite dreamy and reflective. I'm talking about women! [*Laughs*] Let's not forget the gender ethics of heavy metal. "Once she was beautiful, once she was fine…" It's about booze as well: "Whiskey woman, don't you know that you're driving me insane?" Then it's got the incredible lead break and the big crushing ending with the screaming vocal. It's just so pure. So, that's the go-to track.

WHO ARE YOUR THREE FAVORITE NON-METAL SINGERS? — brunovargasbru David Bowie. I go back to his first album [1967's *David Bowie*] and the song "Rubber Band." I saw Bowie as Ziggy Stardust at a place in Wolverhampton, which Priest played decades later. I remember pointing to the balcony and saying, "Where you're sitting is where I was when I saw Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars." He did the entire album. What a great memory. There's no one that goes remotely close to that man. He's one of the greatest architects of rock & roll *ever*. And his voice has so much character. It's Bowie-esque. [*Laughs*] But that's how important a reference he is, isn't it? That the term "Bowie-esque" exists. And then I have to go to the opera world with [Luciano] Pavarotti, of course. You listen to him and think, How can a human voice do that? It's just so crazy. And then I'm gonna say Carole King. I love her voice. All those dates at the Troubadour with James Taylor. She's a beautiful singer.

ROBERTO RICCIUTI/REDFERNS

Judas Priest, London, 1977

SONY MUSIC ARCHIVE VIA GETTY IMAGES/TOM SHEEHAN

THIS YEAR IS A BIG ONE FOR PRIEST ANNIVERSARIES. YOUR FIRST ALBUM *ROCKA ROLLA* TURNS 50 AND *DEFENDERS OF THE FAITH* TURNS 40. THE DIFFERENCE IS PRETTY MAJOR BETWEEN THOSE TWO. WHAT WOULD YOU SAY MOST INFLUENCED THE MUSICAL PROGRESSION BETWEEN '70S AND '80S PRIEST? — Mark Roeffler

I would say that it's a perfect example of how this band's creativity, musicianship and songwriting has developed as we've learned more about each other as people and more about each other's abilities while being acutely aware of everything else that's going on around us. When you listen to *Rocka Rolla* and *Defenders of the Faith*, there are some things that are instantly recognizable, but the breadth of development is pretty strong — as it should be.

It just shows you the diversity of this band with songs like "Rocka Rolla" or "Dying to Meet You," which is a very hippie anti-war song on *Rocka Rolla*, to something like "Freewheel Burning" or "Love Bites" on *Defenders of the Faith*... What I'm trying to say is that Priest has always expressed ourselves in the adventures that we have. That became more pronounced and defined as time went on. The music was getting faster, of course, and there's a sense that there's nothing we cannot do.

YOUR MUSIC WITH JUDAS PRIEST HAS MADE MY LIFE AS A HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT SO MUCH EASIER. WHAT BAND DID THAT FOR YOU WHEN YOU WERE IN HIGH SCHOOL? — liamboba The teenage years are when music really generates a connection, isn't it? Because when you're a teenager, you hate your mum, you hate your dad, you hate your brother, you hate your sister, you hate school, you hate life, but you love your music. It's your only friend. For me, it was the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. In the U.K. press, the Rolling Stones were always the "bad boys" of the British music scene because of Mick [Jagger] and his persona. The Stones were seen as "edgy" while the Beatles in the Sixties were pure pop. But those were the two bands for me.

WHAT WAS THE FIRST RECORD YOU EVER BOUGHT? — james_iguessImao

Hand on heart, I honestly can't remember the first record I bought. But I do remember the first time I ever held a 45 [single] in my hand. It was from a record player that my aunt gave me. She was getting a new one, so she gave me her old one. I was barely into my teen years, if at all. When I opened the lid of the player, there were singles from Elvis Presley, Little Richard and Bill Haley & His Comets. I remember putting on Little Richard first, "Tutti Frutti," and thought, What the hell is this? Why am I getting these tingles? I had no idea about music, but those three singles were the first spark in the metal furnace.

WHEN YOU'RE OFF THE ROAD AND NOT MAKING MUSIC, WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE HOBBY? — Jacob Hurley I live in a beautiful part of Arizona, and there's so many places to visit and experience. In my neighborhood there's all these hills and trails. I've always loved walking because humankind has been walking since the beginning, and it does things to you. It's great for clearing your mind and emptying the brain clutter. You always think clearly outside of the cave. Every single night when I'm here in Phoenix, I go for my nightly walks. I take about 45 minutes to an hour. I have to do it. It's part of clearing out the day. I do it at night because I'm a vampire. It's quieter and generally a bit cooler, unless it's the summer. That, for me, is just a really nice way to let go and recharge.

Rob Halford, circa 1978

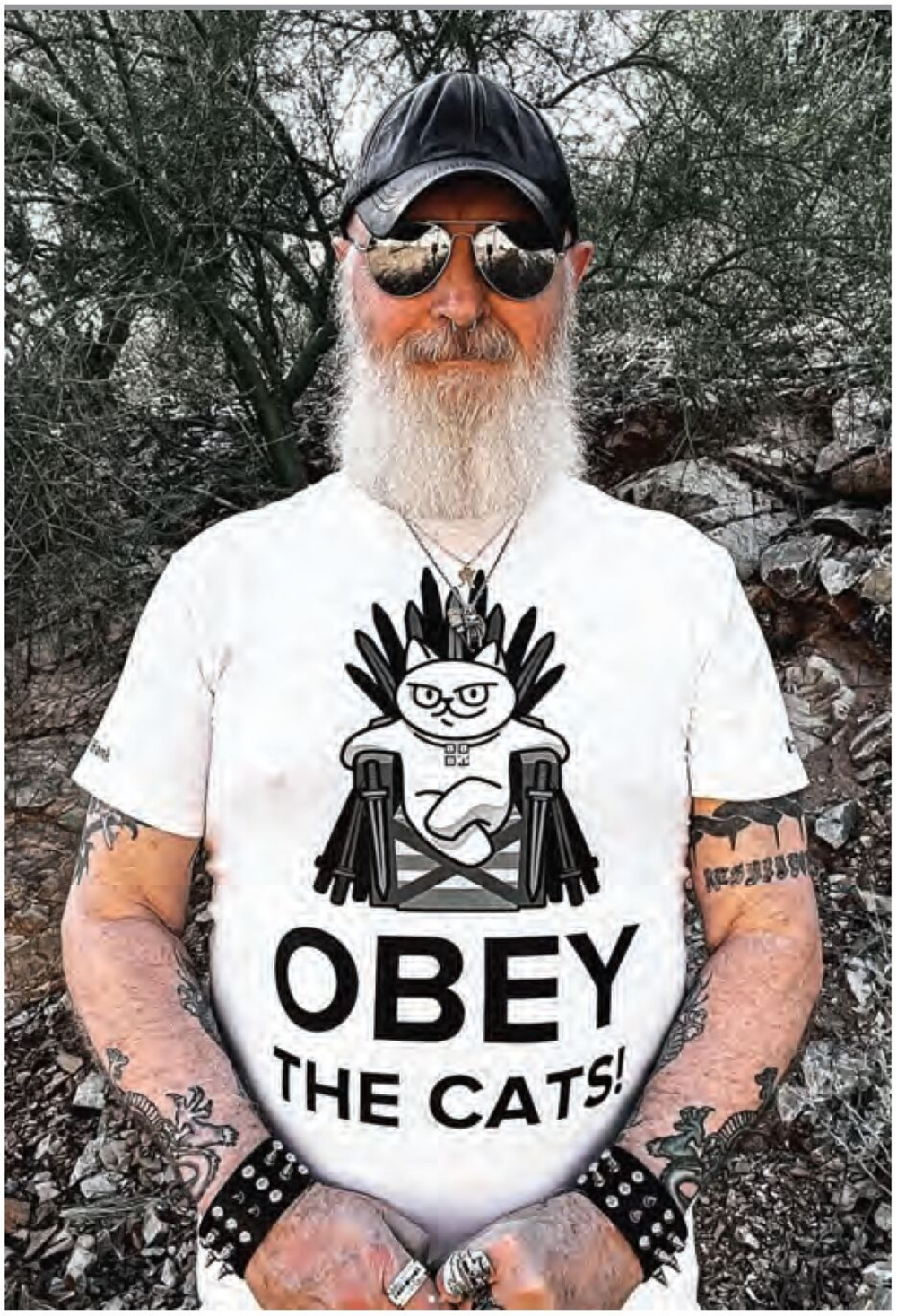
FIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS

WHAT IS YOUR MOST EMBARRASSING ONSTAGE MOMENT? — swirlystars.shine We did a show at what used to be called the London Hammersmith Odeon. It was *the* place — every band wanted to play there. I put the photo up on my Instagram a while ago. In the picture, I'm wearing this Roman gladiator kind of top, like a vest covered in studs but with one sleeve. Because if you look at illustrations of Roman gladiators, they have the sword arm covered in leather and studs, and then the bare arm has the shield. Talk about invincible shield! So, we're onstage and I'm literally whipping the crowd with my bullwhip. You can't do that now — you'd get canceled — but somehow, someone grabbed hold of the whip and pulled me into the pit. For some unknown reason, I started to tear my clothes off. When I finally resurfaced onstage, I was naked from the waist down. If you look at the picture, there's a black triangle covering my nether regions. My first thought was, That triangle is extremely small. [*Laughs*] If that's not Spinal Tap, I don't know what is. It was embarrassing, to say the least. But at the time, it was great fun because I was blitzed out of my mind.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE SONG TO PERFORM LIVE, AND WHICH SONG DO YOU DREAD WHEN IT COMES UP IN THE SETLIST?— Jimmy Baker I always dread "Painkiller" because I always think, They're going to want me to sing exactly like I sang it in 1991, and I can't. I just put my head down and do it, but that song always comes with trepidation. For my favorite, I'm gonna have to go with "Living After Midnight" because it's generally the last song of the set and it's such a great conclusion. Everyone's in a good mood, and it's a celebration. It's like KISS' "Rock and Roll All Nite."

WHAT WAS THE EXPERIENCE LIKE WHEN YOU AUDITIONED FOR JUDAS PRIEST? — samuelrubio55 [Former Priest guitarist] Ken [K.K. Downing] came to meet me at the place I was living at because he'd heard about me from my sister Sue, who was at that time dating Ian. I was in unknown local bands like Hiroshima, Athens Wood, Abraxis... [*Laughs*] So, we had a chat. As soon as I said I was a Hendrix fan, that was a big bonus for Ken. We talked about *Electric Ladyland*, we talked about Wishbone Ash, who were the spark for Ken thinking about having twin guitars. We went to this famous place not too far from where we all lived called Holy Joe's — it was Ken, Ian, myself, John Hinch from Hiroshima — and we just had a jam. I don't remember if we did any covers, and I'm not even sure how many songs Priest had at that point. But I remember we jammed for about an hour and everybody was happy.

YOU'RE THE ALL-POWERFUL METAL GOD, BUT HAVE YOU EVER BEEN STARSTRUCK? — Larry O Yes. I met Her Majesty the Queen at Buckingham Palace. I'm a royalist — I love the royal family. For all of their quirkiness, they're just like us. But when I think about her as a person and what she did for the U.K. and the Commonwealth, to be given that enormous responsibility as a young person, and to carry her duty to the country and the people of the U.K. and elsewhere, she never wavered. She was such an admired individual. She was such a great representation of the good things we all wish we had inside of us. So, I was in the music room at Buckingham Palace with Brian May, Cilla Black and Kate Bush, and we're just having a chitchat — we all stopped talking when she came into the room. We just looked and there she is, this diminutive figure who was literally just glowing with this aura about her. For me, a kid from a public housing estate in the West Midlands, it was a big moment. I was in awe.



COURTESY OF ROB HALFORD

How many cats do you have and what are their names? – twistofchanes

I don't have any cats at the moment. But my beloved cats who are in kitty heaven, one was named Ben and one was Mr. Smokey. He was a long-haired Persian. Beautiful demeanor, but terrible to look after because if he ever had a loose shit you had to wash his ass. Otherwise, he'd drag it around the house. [*Laughs*] But the thing I love about cats — and I want to be careful here, because I love dogs as well — is that they're so independent and indifferent. [My partner] Thomas and I have always said that if and when I retire, we'll have a house full of them.

Another one was Jack Nicholson. After the [1985] Live Aid show in Philadelphia, there was a big party at some penthouse. It was all these people drinking, smoking, drugging — everything — and I see this guy just leaning against the wall by himself. It's Jack fucking Nicholson from *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and everything else. Why is he by himself? You think, I really wanna say hi, but I don't wanna be a dork and say something cheesy. So, I just went over and introduced myself. And then some drunk guy came up going, "Fucking Cuckoo's Nest!" and all this stuff. Jack gave him the famous grin, and the guy just stumbled off. I said, "I bet you get that all the time." And he said, "All the time, man. *All the time*."

EVERYBODY KNOWS YOU'RE THE METAL GOD. WHAT IF, LIKE A KING, YOU WERE ABLE TO PASS THE TITLE DOWN TO ANOTHER MUSICIAN? WHO WOULD YOU CHOOSE TO BE YOUR SUCCESSOR? — Steve Beam Like a king… or a queen! [*Laughs*] This is so tough, but my head instantly goes to Doro from Warlock. And then she would be the Metal Goddess. I just love women in metal and rock & roll, like Nita Strauss and Lzzy Hale. But let's give it to Doro. She and I could be brother and sister, because everything about us in the purest sense of metal is identical: The way she presents herself, the way she talks about her music and her fans. It's a very real existence for her. So, here you go, Doro!

ARE CODPIECES UNCOMFORTABLE TO WEAR? — ronpilarski

Your photographer Travis Shinn has an affection for my codpieces. [*Laughs*] Actually, it wasn't a codpiece — it was a leather jockstrap with an Oxballs Meat cock ring to give extra bulge. Because the bulge is important in rock & roll. Just ask Spinal Tap, Mick Jagger and the most famous bulge of all time: Tom Jones. [*Laughs*] I'm having fun with it because I like that rock & roll connection. Plus, I'm always wearing chaps because I like to be loose and free. But there's no such thing as an uncomfortable gay man in a codpiece.

WHAT'S BEEN THE HAPPIEST MOMENT OF YOUR CAREER AND WHAT'S BEEN THE SADDEST? — Sean Bevans The happiest was when the postman knocked on my door and gave me a copy of *Rocka Rolla*. I thought, This is it, man. Things are gonna be great now! It took another 12 years before I could claim success, but I remember that like it was yesterday. The label said, "We're sending you one copy each. It's coming special delivery, so be there! We paid extra for the postage and don't want to send it back again." So, I was sitting there waiting for the bell to ring all day. I hated the sleeve, hated the name, but whatever. It's what's on the vinyl that matters.

I don't have any regrets in life because I think that mistakes are meant to be made. You have to utilize those moments. So, I don't think I've really had a worst moment in my career. Personally, there was a moment when it was so dark for me. I was sitting in my bedroom with a bottle of Jack Daniel's and a bottle of sleeping pills, taking a sip and popping a pill, taking another sip and popping another pill and going, "Nobody loves me." I look at that now and it's almost like a cartoon — but it isn't because it's heartbreaking. Alcohol addiction just tramples on everything that you are in life, like it did with the successes I was having with Priest at that time. When that happened, *Turbo* wasn't too far away, which was a successful record for Priest. So, that's the yin and yang of my life.

WHAT ARE YOUR BEST TIPS FOR DEALING WITH PREJUDICE AGAINST THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY? — eyeolair Well, you've got an enormous amount of resources available to you if you're in that dark place where you feel terribly alone. I'm not gonna make this about me, but I will say that there are certain experiences that all of us in the LGBTQ+ arena have felt, which is the uncertainty of "Who am I? Why am I like this? Why am I not like that? Is there something wrong with me? Am I an abomination? Am I gonna burn in hell?" I can relate to those feelings as much as younger people.

You know, some people come out at 90 years old on their deathbeds. It's so profound, this finding yourself and learning how to love yourself and to know, first and foremost, you're not alone. It's a very, very big deal to come out of that dark place into euphoria and love and brightness. But everyone has to find their own way. Like a lot of things in life, you get information and suggestions and ideas from people, but you have to find the peace within yourself to accept yourself for who you are. Once you've done that, you live for yourself and not for others. That's a really important thing for anyone, regardless of your sexual identity.

LAST BUT NOT LEAST: WHEN ARE YOU GOING TO BE A JUDGE ON *RUPAUL'S DRAG RACE*? –bruno.dzialoszynski I love that show, and I love the people on that show for what they do. It's extremely hard work, and their talent is extraordinary. And I love that they're able to create this remarkable pushback from people who try to kick them around like a football. Don't piss off a drag queen! If you do, your life's over. If they made me a guest judge, it'd be pretty cool. I can see the credits: Metal God!

But I also have an affinity for wearing dresses. When I first moved to Phoenix, I got very close with a band called Surgical Steel. Every Halloween, we'd go to the thrift shop and try on dresses, which was a lot of fun. Then we'd perform on Halloween night at Rocker's Club in Phoenix. All the girlfriends of the Surgical Steel guys would do their hair and nails and everything. I'd be onstage with this Cher-type wig, wearing a cocktail dress, all the other guys are in dresses, and we're doing "You've Got Another Thing Comin'." I'm told that's what we did, anyway. I don't remember a thing about it. If I didn't have the pictures, I wouldn't be able to tell you.

EBET ROBERTS/REDFERNS

architects

Armed with their heaviest music in years, the U.K. metalcore heroes make their move to finally conquer America

TEXT **Dan Epstein**
PHOTOGRAPHY **Ed Mason**

"The **story** of our band, where we are, and everything that's happened with us, just becomes more mind-blowing to me," says Dan Searle, drummer and founder of veteran British metalcore outfit Architects.

"We just finished a European tour, and it was by far and away the biggest tour we've ever done, and our ninth album [2021's *For Those Who Wish to Exist*] went to Number One here in the U.K.," he explains. "To get to those places just seems so unlikely in the grand scheme of things. For me at the time, it felt like if our second or third album didn't blow up, then we missed our chance. And obviously that couldn't have been further from the truth. I can't think of any other bands that have had a journey like this."

Formed in Brighton, England, in 2004, Architects spent their first decade doing a long, slow trudge up the metal ladder before their sixth album, 2014's *Lost Forever // Lost Together*, suddenly punched its way through to the public consciousness. The album, which landed in the U.K. Top 20, also paved the way for the massive success the band has since enjoyed in Europe and Australia. Sadly, their next album, *All Our Gods Have Abandoned Us*, would be their last to feature guitarist and songwriter (and Dan's brother) Tom Searle, who died of cancer in 2016 at the age of 28.

Despite the trauma of Tom's passing, the band have managed to go from strength to strength, both artistically and commercially over the second decade of their existence. But despite their massive popularity overseas, and their position as leaders of the scene that has proffered up such recent breakout stars as Sleep Token (who they championed for years) and Spiritbox (with whom they've toured and collaborated) — Architects have yet to become the arena-headliners in the U.S. that they are elsewhere in the world.

That may be about to change, however. Architects' surprise single "Seeing Red," their first new release since 2022's *the classic symptoms of a broken spirit* and a return to anthemic heaviness, reached Number Nine on the U.S. Hard Rock charts late last year. And this May, the band — whose lineup currently also includes vocalist Sam Carter, bassist Alex "Ali" Dean and guitarist Adam Christianson (lead guitarist Josh Middleton, who had joined Architects in 2017, amicably departed last May) — will launch their first tour of North America since 2019, with still more stateside dates coming up in the fall. These forays onto U.S. soil will hopefully plant seeds of excitement for their as-yet-unnamed 11th studio album, which the band is currently working on with former Bring Me the Horizon keyboardist-songwriter-producer Jordan Fish for a 2025 release.

On the eve of the release of their new single "Curse" — the first fruit of their collaboration with Fish — *Revolver* caught up with Searle and Carter to talk about perseverance, delving into their own past for inspiration, which other bands make them want to up their game and why 2024 is shaping up to be the year they finally secure their foothold on the United States.

YOU GUYS HAVE HAD SUCH A TUMULTUOUS JOURNEY TO THIS POINT. DURING THE FIRST DECADE OF THE BAND, WHEN YOU WERE STILL STRUGGLING FOR RECOGNITION, WERE YOU EVER TEMPTED TO JUST GIVE UP AND KNOCK IT ON THE HEAD?

DAN SEARLE We never talked about knocking it on the head, ever, but we talked about knocking touring the States on the head, for sure. I remember being on tour with Bring Me the Horizon and Parkway Drive in the States [in 2011], and we were saying, "This is it. This is the last time we tour the States. There's no point in us doing this."

SAM CARTER I think I actually said it onstage in Vegas! [*Laughs*]

SEARLE He was throwing the toys out of the pram, basically. [*Laughs*] But I think the carrot has always been dangled enough to keep us going, and we've always had supportive families and supportive partners. And, you know, I've seen a lot of bands give up and I understand it; but at the same time, I'll look at 'em and think, You were like an album away from a career for the rest of your life! And that could have been the situation with us; plenty of bands in our situation would have had too much pride to carry on. But I can't recall us ever having a conversation about giving up. Never once.

C'MON — WAS TOURING THE STATES IN THOSE DAYS REALLY THAT BAD?

SEARLE Yes. [*Laughs*] If being away from home for six to seven weeks, sleeping in the van every night, and then coming home and being $20,000 in the red is your idea of a good time, then you might enjoy it.

CARTER There were shows on the first tour we did in America where we would start and the first row would just turn around and have their backs to us. [*Laughs*]

SEARLE And even on, like, the ninth U.S. tour we did, we would drive nine hours to get to the next show and no one would be there. And it was like, "We are losing money, and I could be with my family." And then we released *Lost Forever*, and our first show in the U.S. after it came out was in Denver — it wasn't a big show, it was a pizza place where they made pizza in the front — and we played it and the whole place went off. It went literally from tumbleweeds rolling across every venue where we played, to people being really into it. And we were buzzing!

AND NOW YOU'RE COMING BACK TO THE U.S. FOR THE FIRST TIME IN FIVE YEARS, AND HEADLINING THEATERS.

SEARLE Yeah, it's exciting! It's funny with the States, because our popularity there is always moving sort of years behind what we have in the rest of the world. So when we were playing there and no one cared at all, we played to like a thousand people everywhere else. And then now that we're playing arenas in the U.K. and Europe and Australia, only a couple thousand people will see us each night in the States. And you would think you would feel like, "Well, who gives a fuck? It's only two thousand people." But it's not like that at all. Having fans in the States

Architects, (clockwise from top left)
Sam Carter, Alex “Ali” Dean, Dan Searle
and Adam Christianson

> "Plenty of bands in our situation would have had too much pride to carry on. But I can't recall us ever having a conversation about giving up. Never once."
> — Dan Searle

feels like the most gratifying and rewarding achievement of them all, because we thought it was impossible.

DAN, YOU'VE SPOKEN IN THE PAST ABOUT HOW YOUR LATE BROTHER HAS BEEN KIND OF A GUIDING LIGHT IN TERMS OF THE MUSIC YOU MAKE, AND THAT YOU WOULDN'T CONSIDER PUTTING SOMETHING OUT THAT TOM WOULD NOT BE INTO. DO YOU STILL FEEL THAT WAY?

SEARLE No, to be honest. [*Laughs*] I think we've probably released a few songs that Tom wouldn't necessarily be into. But it's really hard to say, because Tom died when he was 28, and he would've been 36 now. And, you know, 28 to 36, it's not an enormous amount of time and you don't change massively, but you do change to a degree, right? And I don't know exactly what Tom would be into now.

But yeah, we've just had to let go of that, over time. But for the first record we were working on after he died, that was definitely true. But Tom was quite fussy, and to be honest I think that's what made making music so strenuous for him — just trying to meet the sort of vision of what he had in his head. Tom would drive himself up the wall trying to meet his own expectations. And I think that's something that we've tried to *not* do; we've tried to maintain a sort of healthy, happy relationship with the music we create as much as possible.

CARTER I think we are still, at our core, the same kind of people that we were when Tom was alive and when we were touring in a converted postal van, making fifty pounds a night in merch and staying on a stranger's floor. I think we're just as critical about our own music as we were then, but we're also trying to be grateful for what we have, and just enjoy the time that we have with each other and the times that we can create stuff that we love together. And try not to overthink it as much as maybe our minds would like to. [*Laughs*]

SO, WHERE ARE YOU AT WITH THE NEW ALBUM?

SEARLE We're just writing at the moment, putting it all together, figuring it out. It's going really well. We're feeling very excited.

YOU'RE WORKING WITH JORDAN FISH ON THIS ONE, RIGHT?

SEARLE Yeah, he's just come out of a long-term relationship. [*Laughs*] We've always toyed with this idea of collaborating together — we share similar tastes and sort of see music in a similar way — but it really wasn't possible when he was busy with Bring Me the Horizon. But when that came to an end, we both sort of found ourselves in a position where working together just made sense. This band has sort of just switched up the way it's operated, creatively, with Josh leaving; changes like this have been forced upon us in the past, with losing my brother and situations like that, but it's exciting what it's stirred up. And I think people are gonna be pretty excited when they hear what we've come up with.

HAD YOU ALREADY STARTED WORK ON THE ALBUM WHEN JORDAN SUDDENLY BECAME AVAILABLE?

CARTER Yeah. Dan and I had a lot of conversations over the summer about where we wanted to take things and how we wanted to do things. We are both in the process of moving away from Brighton; well, Dan has already left, but he'd come back to Brighton to do the record, and I'd stalled leaving Brighton so we could really get our heads locked in for this album, because we felt like it was a really important moment for us and for our band — and with Josh leaving, it really needed to be right. But then everything that happened with Jordan, that was at the end of us writing "Seeing Red," so everything kind of has fallen into place.

WAS "SEEING RED" WRITTEN AND RECORDED AS A ONE-OFF, AS OPPOSED TO A PREVIEW OF THE NEXT ALBUM?

SEARLE Well, we just had this idea of a heavy song that was about people wanting us to be heavy, and it being a little bit cheeky and a bit of fun. After doing a couple of different records and having experienced the online backlash over them, it just felt like the perfect next step, and the perfect way to break the ice and diffuse the situation. It's like someone making a joke at a wake or something, and now everyone can relax. We probably *will* put it on the album, but it really was just like the obvious choice to bridge between albums, and to let everyone know that the band was still in safe hands, despite us losing a member who was creatively involved.

IF "SEEING RED" WAS THE BRIDGE, HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE NEW SINGLE "CURSE"?

CARTER I think it's the perfect way to set off what we're gonna do with the ideas that we're coming up with. It's pulled some influence from some of our older kind of sounds, and we've also sort of brought in what we've learned over the past couple of records, as well. But we're really stoked with how it came out, and I think you can hear how much fun we had creating it with Jordan, as well. I think me, Dan and Jordan have got a really special thing going on at the moment, and I'm just excited for people to hear it.

SEARLE It feels like the perfect marriage between old Architects and new Architects. There's hints of what we've done in the past that will be very clear to everyone, but it's done in a way that you've never heard us do it before.

"SEEING RED" WAS DONE AS A FOUR-PIECE LINEUP. IS THIS HOW THE BAND WILL BE GOING FORWARD, OR DO YOU SEE YOURSELVES ADDING ANOTHER GUITARIST?

CARTER Yeah, we have the four of us that have been around since *Lost Forever*; I think people sometimes seem to forget that Adam's been with us for that amount of time. We do have a couple of people that have been playing live with us since last summer, and they'll continue to play with us because we enjoy actually

having everybody playing on the stage with us, rather than being reliant on a lot of tracks. Like, we still *do* have tracks, but the less we can have, the better. It's been great to have them with us, but the four of us are Architects, and I think it will stay that way.

We've been around a while, especially me, Dan and Ali. Dan's been in the band for 20 years; I've been in it for like 17. We've been through a lot of stuff together, and we've seen a lot of stuff. I think it's important at this point to be able to pull from the experiences of the band. At this point, especially where we are now, you really can look back at what you've done and pull some influences from it. Because we've been around for so long, there's still records that we like now that we released, like, 10 years ago. Before that, there were records where we were like, "Oh, I'm not so sure about that." [*Laughs*]

SEARLE Before we started writing *For Those Who Wish to Exist*, we sort of made a conscious effort to exclude certain things that we had done that had become like "our thing." And I suppose we had started seeing a lot of other bands do those things, as well; obviously, it's nice for people to be influenced by the band, but it starts to sound kind of homogenized when lots of other bands are doing those things. So we put those things aside and tried to discover a new identity, if you like. But now there's been a long enough amount of time since then, and the landscape of what other bands, our other peers, are doing has changed. And it feels like it would be a cool time to reintroduce some of those things we'd set aside, but do it in a way that's updated and sounds more modern.

THIS YEAR MARKS THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF *LOST FOREVER // LOST TOGETHER*. HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THAT RECORD NOW?

"In metal, you can get boundaried into quite a small space — and people want you generally to stay there. It's not been always comfortable pushing those boundaries and redefining what the band is."
— Searle

CARTER I love that record. I'm never really fussed about anniversaries, but yeah — this one felt like an important one. I think it's a time in the band when things started stepping up, and we noticed like a real shift around the world; it was just a great time for us as people, and for us as a band. We did a lot of touring on that, and we made some great memories. And it was the last album that Tom got to fully tour around the world, so there's a lot of memories attached to that, as well. It's a record you can look back on and be really proud of. I think for a lot of the time before that, we were like, "Why isn't this band doing much? Why isn't this band doing this and that?" And then we released that record, and we were like, "Oh, yes — it's because you actually have to be *good* to start actually doing that stuff!" [*Laughs*]

SEARLE We had toured the U.S. on *Ruin*, *Hollow Crown*, *The Here and Now* and *Daybreaker*, and remained completely unknown and anonymous, no matter how hard we tried. And then the moment we released *Lost Forever*, we didn't blow up, but we went from nothing to something over there; like, we were in people's minds, and people were at the shows and we had fans, and that was a massive deal to us. Because we felt like we had been knocking on the door to no response for *years*. And the funny thing was, it felt like the sudden recognition we had in the States on that album had nothing to do with the years of touring we had done there, and everything to do with the fact that we'd released an album that resonated with people.

I don't think that the albums we released before *Lost Forever* were necessarily terrible, but we didn't really know what we were doing; we loved writing and releasing music, but we weren't really refining it in the way that we did on that album. Something clicked creatively for whatever reason on *Lost Forever*, and maybe it was Tom getting sick, I don't know. But suddenly it felt like, "OK, let's make sure these songs are great." And obviously, we're still learning — we always remain students. But it was just like a shift in our perspective and attitude towards writing music. The quality-control process that you have when you're making music is just so important. And as the band gets bigger, you realize that that bar just has to go higher and higher.

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IN YOUR MINDS, WHAT SPOT DO ARCHITECTS OCCUPY IN THE CURRENT METALCORE LANDSCAPE, OR EVEN THE OVERALL METAL LANDSCAPE OF THE PAST DECADE?

SEARLE I think that's a hard one; we're in it, so we don't really have a good perspective. And in the States, we would be a pretty small chapter in the Holy Book of Metalcore, whereas in other parts of the world we might get a few more columns. [*Laughs*] But I think what's been really great is that on the last two records, we kind of pushed the boundaries of what people thought Architects was. In metal, you can kind of get pretty boundaried into quite a small space, and people want you generally to stay there, and it's not been always comfortable pushing those boundaries and, and sort of redefining what the band is. But if we feel a connection with what we are making, then there's no second thought; we always sort of try and be guided by that gut feeling rather than anything else. And then making sure we push the quality of what we're creating as far as we can.

And like I said earlier, that bar has continued to move higher and higher. There are bands out there doing great things, and we need to meet that level. It's been really cool to see Sleep Token, Bad Omens and Spiritbox all coming along and releasing great music, and getting big recognition for having done so. I think that some people have the perception that, as a more senior band, we might be too wrapped up in our egos to see it that way. I've had a couple of people talk to me as though maybe I'm butt hurt because these other bands have blown up. But it's honestly been nothing but inspiring for us. Bands don't have that level of success just by luck; they have it because they produce something brilliant.

And then there are bands like Gojira and Bring Me the Horizon, who have both been around as long as us or longer, and they continue to grow and attract larger audiences. And you know, a lot of bands get great success on their first album or second album, and then they find themselves closing their shows with the single from their first album for 25 years. I'm not saying that's fundamentally good or bad — but I'm just glad that we keep on topping ourselves, and we keep on being able to improve upon what we've done before, while still maintaining some financial viability and being able to feed ourselves. I just feel like that's a blessing.

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MY LIFE STORY

Scott Stapp

TEXT Eli Enis

Creed's frontman illuminates the highs and lows that made him the person he is today

SCOTT STAPP HAS ALWAYS CRAVED SOMETHING HIGHER.

As a kid, he had his first encounter with God while staring up at the clouds, searching for guidance in the upper decks of our earthly realm. As a teenager, he had sky-high dreams of becoming either a pro athlete or a famous rock singer, the second coming of his hero Jim Morrison. In his twenties, one of those dreams came true when Creed, Stapp's first-ever band, became instant rockstars upon the release of their debut 1997 album, *My Own Prison*. Their second, 1999's *Human Clay*, was an even greater commercial smash. It eventually earned diamond certification (a rare distinction for selling 10 million units achieved by heavyweights including Guns N' Roses and Metallica) and calcified Creed's status as arena denizens, radio-rock stalwarts and Grammy winners (for the song "With Arms Wide Open").

The lead single from *Human Clay* was "Higher," a scorching power-ballad with a chest-beating refrain, the type of chorus that's left many-a dashboard covered in spittle from inspiring full-throated sing-alongs. In it, Stapp pleads to be taken higher to "a place where blind men see" and the streets are paved in gold. He's singing, pretty explicitly, about heaven. But it's also a broader metaphor about Stapp's innate human desire to ascend to someplace better, purer, than where we currently are.

Over the last 25-plus years, for all his many career highs, Stapp has also weathered his fair share of personal lows, including substance abuse issues and arrests. But throughout his struggles, Stapp has never stopped reaching for something higher. By his own admission, his faith and perseverance have carried him through the darkness. And these days, Scott Stapp is basking in the light.

He's in high spirits, a sober and dedicated father of four children and a grandfather to a new baby grandson. He's just released his fourth solo album, *Higher Power*. It's an eclectic work that explores faith, frustration, love and loss through a mix of grungey ballads and metallurgic bangers. It also features his first-ever duet (with rocker Dorothy) and earned him his highest-charting solo single to date ("Higher Power"). And Creed, who went on hiatus in 2012 and haven't issued an album in 15 years, are reuniting for their first tour in over a decade — and it's a big damn deal. Many of the dates sold out immediately, due in no small part to a new generation of enthusiastic Creed fans who weren't even alive when *My Own Prison* debuted.

Creed, the post-grunge posterboys whose staggeringly popular music simultaneously made them a lightning rod for massive praise and many critics, are now a Gen-Z favorite. "Higher," Creed's defining song, has achieved meme supremacy on TikTok, where the towering chorus is used to soundtrack everything from clutch sports achievements to slow-motion videos of an ice block smashing on concrete. Its soaring energy makes even the most mundane actions feel like they're being projected on a stadium jumbotron — and sometimes, they literally are.

When the Texas Rangers clinched the World Series in 2023, the team burst into a recitation of "Higher," claiming it as an anthem of victory. A few months later, the song apeared in a fever-dream Super Bowl ad where actor Sir Patrick Stewart throws a football-shaped cartoon character (the titular *Hey Arnold!*) while Creed rip through "Higher" in the background. However, an even bigger seal of approval, underscoring Creed's — and by extension, Stapp's — return to cultural prominence, came courtesy of SZA, the Grammy-winning, Gen-Z-commanding pop star, who proclaimed her unabashed love for "Higher" in a viral *Variety* interview in late 2023.

SEBASTIAN SMITH

"[Creed] rock! That shit is bomb!" SZA exclaimed, before praising "Higher" specifically: "Have you ever felt more inspired in your life? I'm in the car and I'm blasting 'Higher.'"

SZA's words resonated both online and in the house of Stapp. "It definitely made me a cool dad in my house with my teenage daughter and teenage son," the singer quips. He was particularly happy to see an artist with as much critical esteem as SZA defend the band's artistic integrity. It hasn't always been easy being the face of Creed.

At the turn of the century, Creed's music was so ubiquitous that they became an easy punching bag for anyone who had something negative to say about the state of rock music. The music press could be particularly vicious, but the critiques turned personal when Stapp's substance abuse problems manifested in the 2000s. In 2006, it was widely reported that he attempted suicide after falling off a Miami Beach hotel balcony — a near-tragic event that surreally culminated with rapper T.I., who was staying in a room below, coming to his aid. But Stapp later clarified in his autobiography, *Sinner's Creed*, that it was purely an accident stemming from an overindulgence in drugs and alcohol. He succumbed to what he calls "the pitfalls of what this crazy rock & roll life led me to."

Creed's career was similarly tumultuous. After going on hiatus in 2004, the band reunited for a three-year stint starting in 2009, but by then, the musical landscape had shifted. The post-grunge era Creed conquered was long in the rearview, and glitzy pop-rockers like Imagine Dragons were about to become America's next insurmountably successful (and critically divisive) rock torchbearers. The band split again in 2012, and Stapp's substance issues persisted into the early 2010s. But it's 2024 now, and the scales have tipped back in Creed's favor.

The revival of nu-metal sounds and aesthetics over the last couple years has stepped forward a few paces — and now we're witnessing a moment of collective nostalgia for what came next in rock history: The era when bands like Creed, 3 Doors Down and Daughtry ruled the airwaves. Fittingly all three of those bands are hitting the road later this year for the Summer of '99 tour, Creed's first since 2012. This renewed interest in Stapp's life work couldn't have come at a better time for the singer, who's been enjoying the first extended stretch of stability and happiness in his entire life. He's had a tough go of it, but right now he's thriving, and he doesn't take any of it — from the TikToks and SZA shouts to Creed's reunion or his own *Higher Power* — for granted.

"I'm grateful for the life and the gift that I've been given to be an artist and musician," Stapp tells *Revolver* with a warm sincerity. "This resurgence of Creed, almost to the point where [we're] as big or bigger than we were at our peak in 2002 … To have that happen all these years later, is just a gift. And I'm so full of gratitude and appreciation. There's no expectation in me. There's just humility and gratitude at this stage in my life."

Stapp's journey thus far has been filled with sublime highs and humbling lows. From his turbulent childhood and Creed's lightning-fast ascendance, to persevering through recovery and reconnecting with his higher power, this is his life story.

COURTESY OF SCOTT STAPP

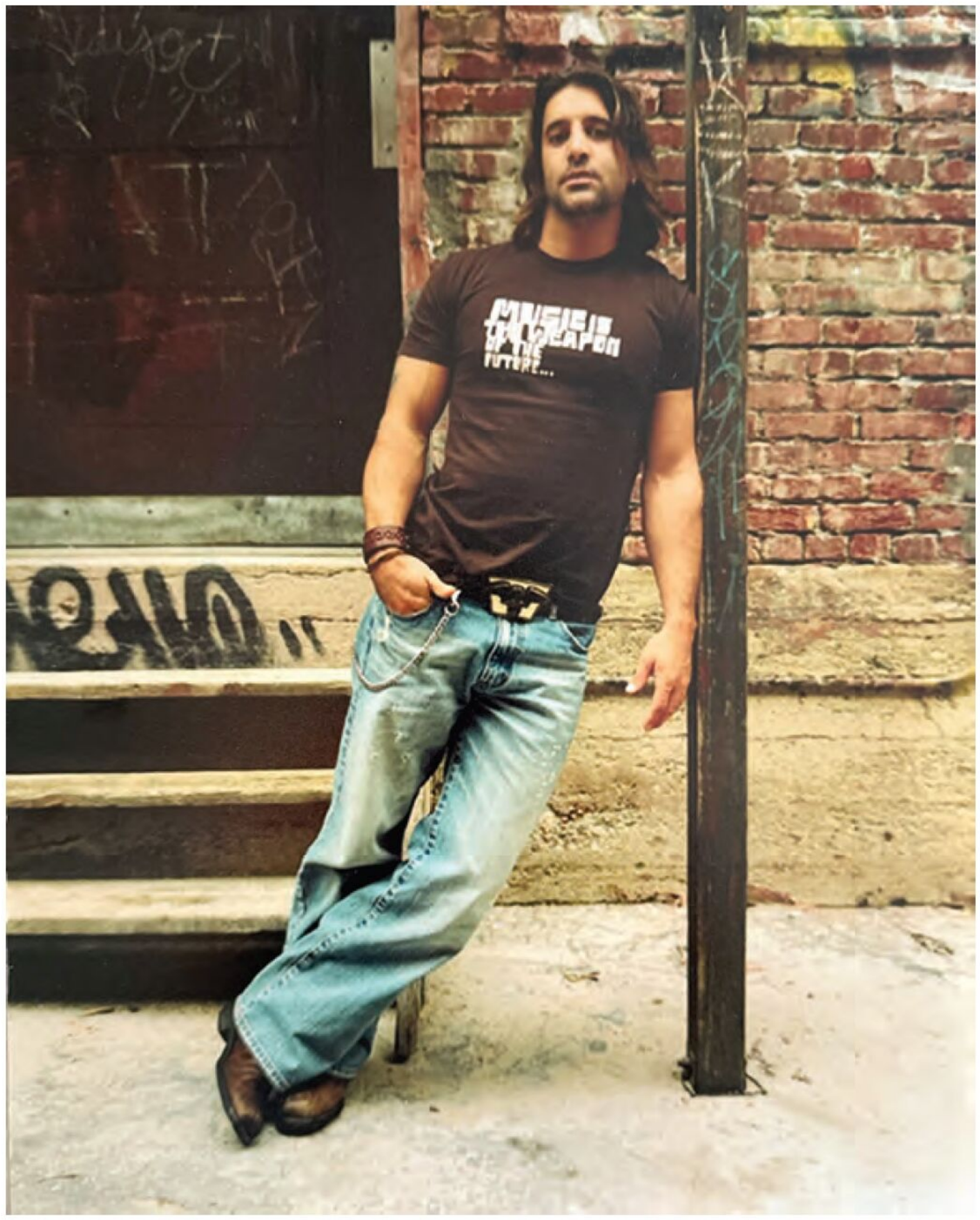
WHEN AND WHERE WERE YOU BORN?
SCOTT STAPP I was born on August 8th, 1973, at Orlando Regional Medical Center in Orlando, Florida.

DO YOU HAVE ANY SIBLINGS? I do. I found out when I was 18 that I had two half-brothers from my biological father that I never knew and never met. And then I have two sisters.

ARE YOU IN CLOSE CONTACT WITH ANY OF THEM, THE HALF-BROTHERS OR THE SISTERS? Well, one of my half-brothers died. The other I have not been in contact with. No, I never knew them. And then my sisters, we haven't been in a lot of contact. Everyone's doing their own thing in life.

SO YOU GREW UP WITH YOUR BIOLOGICAL MOM, BUT DID YOU HAVE A STEPFATHER IN THE HOUSE? My real father left, whom I only had positive memories of, when I was around four or five. And then when I was 10 my mother remarried an Air Force captain who was also a dentist. I was adopted maybe two years later, and my name changed from Anthony Scott Flippen to Scott Allen Stapp. I'm going to change my name back to Anthony Scott. I just haven't gotten around to it. Because I kind of feel like it wasn't my choice. That's why I named my little six-year-old boy Anthony.

WHAT SORT OF RELATIONSHIP DID YOU HAVE WITH YOUR MOM GROWING UP? My mom worked a lot. She was a single mom, and so I spent a lot of time alone. I



(opposite page) Stapp as a child; (left) Stapp, 2005; (below) Stapp and Mark Tremonti performing as Creed, DTE Energy Center, Clarkston, Michigan, 2009

got up in the morning, she was already gone to work. So as early as I can remember, [I was in] first grade, walking to school, eating my breakfast there at school; I was on the free lunch plan. And she wouldn't really get home until late, so I kind of roamed the neighborhood in the streets, just playing outside until it got dark, until the streetlights went on. And then she got remarried and things changed quite a bit.

HOW DID THEY CHANGE? Well, I went from being left to myself pretty much all the time to being in a very controlled environment. A very, very harsh, strict, disciplinary environment.

YOU'VE BEEN OPEN THROUGHOUT YOUR LIFE ABOUT YOUR FAITH IN GOD. WAS RELIGION A BIG PART OF YOUR LIFE GROWING UP? I had an encounter with God when I was nine years old. I remember being very distraught and not understanding why my dad, who I loved so much and had so many amazing experiences with and was my hero, wasn't there anymore. No one ever told me. I just woke up one day and he was gone.

I remember seeing my friends in the neighborhood have a mother and father, and I believe I was even kind of picked on for not having a father. It hurt and [having a father] was something that I yearned for.

And I remember at nine years old laying in the grass looking up to the blue sky, and I asked God, "God, since I don't have a daddy, will you be my daddy?" And it was in that moment from the heart of a child … that my connection with God was born. It wasn't born in a church. It was born in a unique connection with just a boy wanting a father and having nowhere else to look but to God.

DID THAT CONNECTION WITH GOD REMAIN OVER THE YEARS AS YOU GREW UP AND BECAME A ROCK STAR? One hundred percent. Even through my darkest days, even in my worst periods of living a life that an outsider would look at as completely disassociated with God, I was still connected with God. Some of the decisions I would make that weren't very good — that were the complete antithesis of what someone would consider a Christian lifestyle — were made with the deal of me rationalizing it to God.

Saying, "Well God … in the Bible, King Solomon wanted wisdom, and I do, too." And in order for him to gain that, he had to experience all these things and go down all these dark roads … I guess what the church would call sinful experiences. And then while I was experiencing all those things, it developed into something that was very detrimental to my health, my life, my friendships and my relationships. But I was still in communication with God. I would talk to God every day like I'm talking to you. If someone was a fly on the wall, they'd probably be like, "Why is that kid talking to himself?" But I was in conversation with my higher power, with God.

WHAT TYPE OF KID WERE YOU? TROUBLEMAKER? STUDIOUS? WELL-BEHAVED? WILD? Well, prior to my mom remarrying, I was a very, very active child [with] no filter. My intent was never bad, but I was a very high-energy kid. So I found myself in the principal's office quite a bit because of impulsivity and speaking out of turn and standing on my desk and doing a dance to make everybody laugh, all that kind of stuff.

I have memories of seeing an in-school counselor who would just constantly be doing tests and showing me flashcards and asking me weird questions.

LEFT: COURTESY OF SCOTT STAPP; RIGHT: SCOTT LEGATO/FILMMAGIC

(from left) Creed's Stapp, Brian Marshall and Tremonti at Game Three of the American League Championship Series between the Texas Rangers and the Houston Astros, Globe Life Field, Arlington, Texas, October 18th, 2023

CARMEN MANDATO/GETTY IMAGES

And I thought it was better than doing math. … But once my stepfather came in, life abruptly changed, and then I was under his iron fist until I left home at 17.

HOW DID MUSIC COME INTO YOUR LIFE? One time I was in the principal's office and the music teacher came in and said, "What are you doing in here?" I said, "Well, this is my classroom. This is where I have to do my work every day." She walked out, I guess she spoke to somebody, and then came back in: "Anthony, after school I want you to come to [the band] room and see if you want to be a part of the school of music and sing songs and be in plays."

I was nine years old, and next thing you know, I've got all the solos in the upcoming school play. The first song I sang in front of an audience was "Yesterday" by the Beatles. I'll never forget the response I got from all the parents in the auditorium. That moment is when I began thinking, I love this and I want to keep doing it — it's natural for me.

YOU PLAYED BASEBALL IN HIGH SCHOOL, TOO, RIGHT? DID YOU CONSIDER A FUTURE IN ATHLETICS? Yeah, I played baseball and basketball in high school. I absolutely was on the path. I wanted to go to college, and I was getting scholarship offers for baseball and academics. They were kind of parlayed together.

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE MUSIC OVER SPORTS? Well, it just kind of worked out that way. My sports career came to an end. I had scholarship offers from Vanderbilt, University of Pennsylvania, Wake Forest and Emory. And my [stepfather] said, "I think you need another year of development. You're young." Because I graduated at 17. He wanted me to go to this small Christian college in Cleveland, Tennessee, called Lee College, [for a] developmental year before I went to one of the bigger schools to play [baseball].

So, I went there and had an experience smoking weed with the president of the university's son up in the mountains of Tennessee. When we got back, somehow, they knew. It was a small Christian college, and I guess that was a no-go. Instead of lying to the president, I told him the truth, and [they] asked me to leave. So, from there, I ended up discovering the Doors through the Oliver Stone film [1991's *The Doors*]. And that further cemented: Well, [sports are] over, but music is always here, and that passion is still here.

I read that [Doors singer] Jim Morrison went to Florida State University … so I thought musicians grew on trees then if Jim Morrison went there. So, I went there and got into contact with a friend from high school and told her that I was there solely to start a band. And she said, "Well, Mark Tremonti from Lake Highland goes here, and he plays guitar."

And I said, "That's right. He does play guitar." I remembered that in high school [at Lake Highland], the one party that I went to, I was walking down a hallway and outside of a sliding glass window was Mark playing guitar. I said, "Hey, man, I didn't know you played guitar. I sing and write songs, too." He goes, "Cool, man." I was like, "Yeah, that's cool." Then I shut the door. And so I [eventually] connected with Mark [at Florida State University], and the rest is history.

"I went from living in a three-bedroom apartment with four dudes sleeping on mattresses to all of a sudden doing interviews on MTV, playing on late-night shows, making music videos and playing in arenas."
— Scott Stapp

YOU'VE ALSO BEEN OPEN ABOUT YOUR TURBULENT MENTAL HEALTH JOURNEY AS AN ADULT. WHEN DID YOU FIRST REALIZE YOU WERE HAVING MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES? My issues are all surrounding alcohol and drug use. As long as I stay away from alcohol and any road that that leads me down, I'm good. The sad times, the depressive periods that I've had in my life, were all situational.

THE REASON I ASK IS THAT YOU REVEALED IN 2015 THAT YOU WERE DIAGNOSED WITH BIPOLAR DISORDER. One thing that you learn in the recovery process, or in treatment, is you can't diagnose somebody with any kind of mental health condition, especially at 40. If you're bipolar, that's something that manifests by age 25 or sooner. And so when you're using alcohol and then when you're using a depressant and then a stimulant, it can look like you have a mental health condition that you don't have. The symptoms are the same.If you're using alcohol and painkillers, that's low. But then if you're accompanying that later on that day with stimulant abuse, then you're high. So from the outside, looking at that, not knowing that that's causing these swings, of course you could think that [it's bipolar disorder]. After I became sober and got to the other side of that, the final diagnosis was PTSD. And that's just something that accumulated over years of trauma. That wasn't something that I was born with. That was something that life dealt me after living the life that I've lived and the experiences that I've gone through.

BETWEEN THE TIME CREED FORMED IN 1994 AND THE ALBUM *MY OWN PRISON* WAS RELEASED IN 1997, WHAT DID YOUR LIFE LOOK LIKE? I was working at a restaurant. I was a cook. And Mark was doing the same thing. He was a cook at Chili's, and I was a cook at Ruby Tuesday. And I was going to school, paying my way through school, and then we were practicing and rehearsing. I was working because I had no support from my family.

HOW DID IT FEEL TO GO FROM A COLLEGE STUDENT WORKING HIS ASS OFF TO SUDDENLY BEING IMMERSED IN THIS ROCK-STAR LIFESTYLE ONCE *MY OWN PRISON* CAME OUT? My mindset at the time was that's just how it was supposed to happen. I thought you were supposed to make your record, get a record deal, and then it was supposed to blow up and you were supposed to go and play arenas and stadiums. That's what happened to all the bands that were my heroes, so my expectation at the time was the same thing was going to happen to us.

DID YOU FEEL YOU WERE AT A PLACE PERSONALLY TO DEAL WITH THAT LEVEL OF SUDDEN FAME? Absolutely not. Looking back, it was basically the same way I was taught how to swim by my grandfather. He just threw me in the pool, you know what I mean? I went from living in a three-bedroom apartment with four dudes sleeping on mattresses to all of a sudden doing interviews on MTV, playing on late-night shows, making music videos and playing in arenas. I was completely not emotionally or mentally [ready]. Nor did I have the support structure around me to really handle it appropriately or have the right guidance or counsel to help me navigate through it without succumbing to the pitfalls that I would find myself in later.

WHAT DID YOUR FAMILY MAKE OF YOU WHEN YOU BECAME A ROCK STAR? We really didn't have a relationship after the Lee College experience. … So it probably shocked them. They weren't a big supporter of anything really I was doing, especially the music.

WERE YOU HAPPY ABOUT THE SUCCESS THAT CREED WAS HAVING? I was living the dream, man. I went from [being] 18 watching the Oliver Stone film, falling in love with the Doors and wanting to be just like Jim Morrison, to playing with the remaining members of the Doors [in 2000]. I was a lifelong Dallas Cowboy fan and ended up doing the Dallas Cowboys halftime show [in 2001]. Every dream that I had as a child — in terms of music and where it would take me — all happened. I was loving it, but it all happened so fast that by [Creed's 2001] *Weathered* album, I needed a break … During the *Weathered* tour is when I started breaking down, and it all started with a car crash. We were getting ready to go shoot the "One Last Breath" video, I was in traffic at a dead stop and got hit from behind by a car doing about 55, 60 miles an hour. And I'm in the emergency room, my manager shows up and basically says, "Man, we're going to lose 100 thousand dollars a day. Whatever the doctor's got to do to get you to the [video] set, we got to do." And I had that athlete mindset: Take one for the team, put me in coach, shoot me up [with prescription painkillers] in the locker room at halftime. So I took a handful of pills and went and shot that video. And then there was a tour following [that].

So it was a culmination of a lot of things that started to create a downward spiral, and I saw it coming … I don't think everyone was really looking at the long-term. Everyone was looking at it like, this could still end tomorrow. And then my personality was to continue at all costs, even at the expense of my health. You combine that with the other things around me, it just wasn't a good situation. I really can't blame anybody. It is what it is. I'm just thankful to be alive here today and talking to you.

Stapp performing solo, The Canyon Club, Agoura Hills, California, 2019

YOU AND YOUR WIFE, JACLYN, HAVE THREE CHILDREN TOGETHER. WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED ABOUT YOURSELF BEING A FATHER? I'm thankful for everything that she's been in my life and the beautiful children we've created together — because all of that combined has given me the fuel and the reason and the motivation to make the changes that I needed to make in my life. [To escape] from the pitfalls that this crazy rock & roll world led me into. It's been a gift and a blessing.

My whole philosophy in going into fatherhood was clearly stated in the song "With Arms Wide Open." I didn't want to pass down the same things that I felt like shouldn't be passed down that happened to me. I wanted to break "generational curses." And so, I just tried to do my best to show up for them, let them know that I love them every day, and just be a good dad in the best way that I know how. I'm thankful for every one of them because they've definitely made me want to be a better man.

HOW DID YOU WANT TO APPROACH YOUR NEW SOLO RECORD, *HIGHER POWER*? I don't go into records with any kind of preconceived idea of what I'm going to create. I create in moments of inspiration, and each song is indicative and reflective of what I was experiencing at the time I was creating the record. So it's really hard to answer that question from the standpoint of what was I trying to do going into it — because I wasn't trying to do anything. I had no gun to my head. I had no timeline, there was no pressure. I just set up studio time when I felt compelled to write and create.

I end this album with [a song about] where I hope to be at the end of this phase in my life, how I hope to feel. And I really feel like that song ["Weight of the World"] is not only to comfort me, but [for] presenting to the world in hopes that it does the same for them, and also my kids.

WITH CREED REUNITING THIS YEAR, HOW DOES IT FEEL TO BE REVISITING THOSE SONGS AND ALL THE MEMORIES OF CREED FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE MAN YOU ARE NOW? It's incredible, man. I still connect with those songs. I continued to carry the flag for Creed for years and played those songs as a part of my solo set. There's a chemistry that Creed has together when we're onstage and play these songs. I'm excited for it to happen and excited to play it for the fans that have clearly let us know that they want it.

And so I think the thrill of it all is going to create the energy necessary, but also you got to learn to pace yourself. All the extracurricular stuff that we all did back in the day, being in our early twenties, in our early thirties, that's all gone. We're all living very healthy, fit lives. When we're off the road, man, I'm in bed with my kids at 9 p.m. and I'm up at 5 a.m. Health is important.

As my album says, I stay connected to my higher power because when I'm connected to God and my higher power, good things happen. When I deviate from my path, bad things happen. So I've got the key to unlock the door. It's just a matter of staying focused and just enjoying this ride and pacing myself because it is going to be a marathon — but it's going to be a good one. ⓡ

SCOTT DUDELSON/GETTY IMAGES

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Bruce Dickinson

Iron Maiden's singer talks greatest songs, creepiest gifts, scariest flights and more

TEXT Dan Epstien

"IT HAS LONG BEEN OBVIOUS TO ME that comics and metal should be related," says Bruce Dickinson, as he holds court with *Revolver* in a room overlooking New York's Central Park. Which is why, the longtime Iron Maiden frontman admits, he was a little disappointed with *Legacy of the Beast*, the comic his band released in conjunction with the video game of the same name. "The graphics were great, but there was no real story there, and I thought that was a bit of a waste. But then I thought, You know what? If *I* did an album, maybe I could do a comic with the album — and maybe the album would be the story of the comic. OK, let me think of a story, then..."

Dickinson did just that, which is why his new Roy Z-produced album *The Mandrake Project* — his first solo LP since 2005's *Tyranny of Souls* — has a comic of the same name to go with it. Of course, never one to do things by half-measures, Dickinson teamed up with writer Tony Lee, artist Staz Johnson, cover artist Bill Sienkiewicz and Z2 Comics to create not just a single-issue tie-in, but 12 quarterly issues that will eventually be collected into three annual graphic novels. The saga revolves around one Dr. Necropolis, a drug-taking, occult-obsessed, tattooed twenty-something scientist involved in the Mandrake Project, a clandestine program that harvests souls from dying rich people and stores them until they can be reinserted into new healthy bodies.

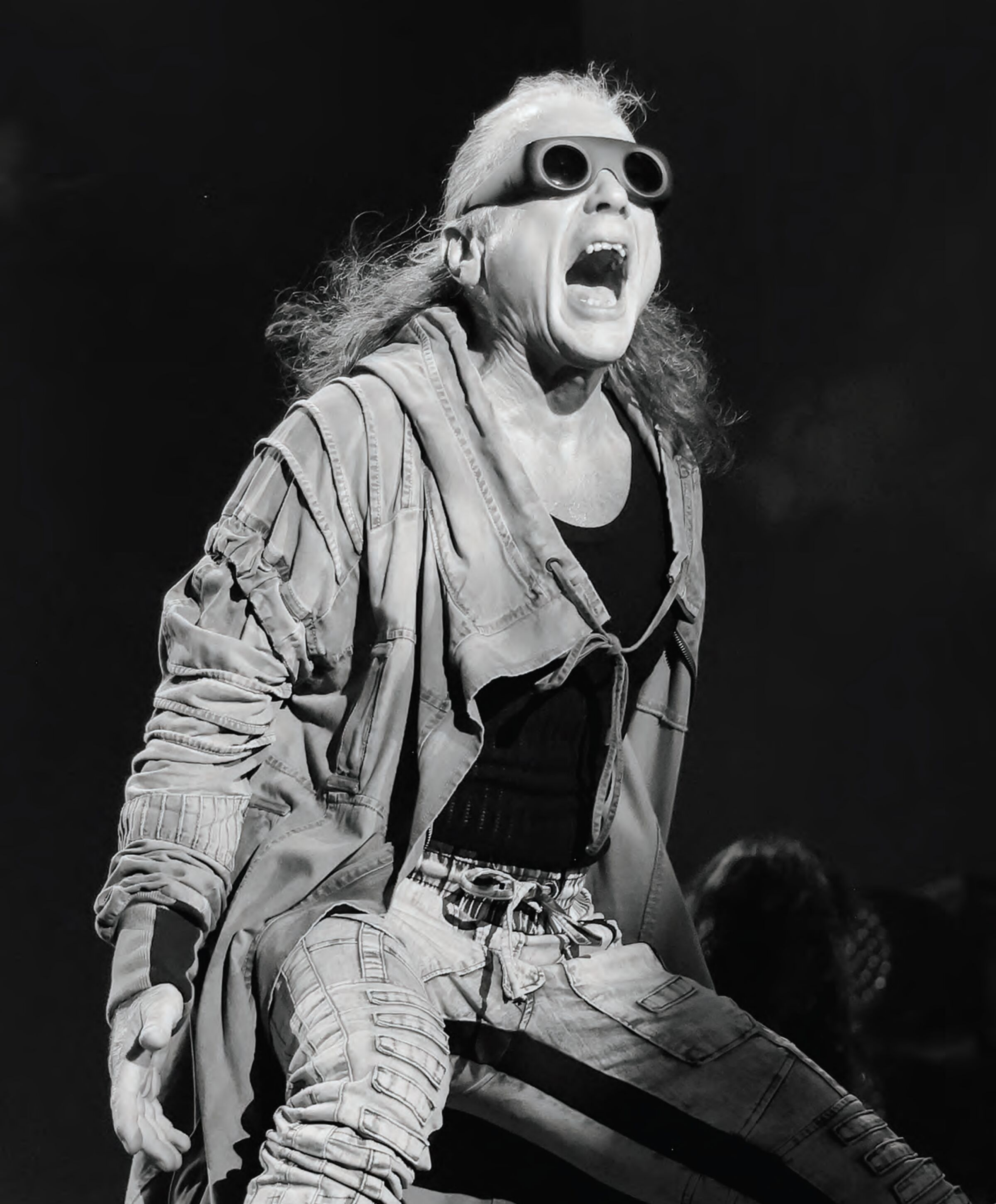
The comic is dark, intense, amusing and at times quite moving — and the same can be said for Dickinson's new album. From the explosive opening track, "Afterglow of Ragnarok," to the deeply emotional 10-minute closer, "Sonata (Immortal Beloved)," *The Mandrake Project* is a high-impact rollercoaster ride that may well be Dickinson and guitarist Roy Z — whose creative partnership stretches back to Dickinson's 1994 album *Balls to Picasso* — finest collaboration to date. But even though the video for "Ragnarok" features Dr. Necropolis and dramatizes some scenes from the comic's first issue, Dickinson wants to make it very clear that the album is not a soundtrack to the comic; nor, for that matter, were the events and storylines of the comic at all dictated by the album's songs.

"Roy and I had been working on the album going back to 2014, and as excited as I was about the idea of the comic, I thought that there's no way I'd want the album to be a slave to it. And that decision freed me up to do whatever I like with the record. It's got enough links to the comic; the analogy I use is like two freestanding trees that are linked at the roots.

"One of the things I really love about the album is that we have an album full of stealth emotion here," he continues. "It takes you to a lot of places emotionally you're not expecting to go, and that's extremely rare for a metal album. I genuinely feel that we've done something — probably unwittingly — that's really, really extraordinary. I mean, not just saying that 'cause I've got a big head; when I listen to the record, I actually feel humbled by it. I'm like, 'How did we do *that*?'"

As long as *Revolver* has the attention of one of the greatest singers in heavy-metal history, we ask him if he'd like to be the first in our new superlative Q&A series: The Greatest Interview Ever. Not surprisingly, Dickinson is game, though he does reveal a slight trace of trepidation at the outset. "This isn't like the Voight-Kampff empathy test in *Blade Runner*, is it?" He laughs. "Because if it is, you'd better just get out your blaster now..."

KEVIN MAZUR/GETTY IMAGES FOR POWER TRIP



Dickinson performing with Iron Maiden at Hammersmith Odeon, London, 1983

WHAT IS THE GREATEST SONG YOU'VE EVER WRITTEN?
BRUCE DICKINSON I would say "Tears of the Dragon" [from *Balls to Picasso*], 'cause I don't know what it means. But it means *something*; that song really affects people. It affects me. I do know what it's about: It's about abandonment, not *being* abandoned, but abandoning yourself to the universe, to whatever is gonna come next. But I still don't know why it is "the tears of the dragon." I've never figured that out. It works and it means something, but I don't know what it is. And that's why it's great.

WHAT'S THE WORST SONG YOU'VE EVER WRITTEN? Oh, there's a few. Probably "Zulu Lulu," [from 1990's *Tattooed Millionaire*] as it's got one of the worst puns on record: "She looked me up and down and said, 'Assegai for me.'" [*Laughs*]

WHAT IS THE SONG YOU'RE PROUDEST OF? Oh man, pick your favorite child… What song would I want them to play in the slot machine over my grave? [*Laughs*] Possibly "Jerusalem" [from 1998's *The Chemical Wedding*], which is not my song. I mean, I co-wrote it with Roy; but that one, yeah.

WHAT IS THE CRAZIEST FAN GIFT YOU'VE EVER RECEIVED? I sometimes get people sending me strange items of jewelry that have, like, magical powers and things to ward off evil spirits. It goes straight in the bin. Not that I believe in evil spirits; but if there are any, it's more likely to be in the jewelry than not. [*Laughs*]

WHAT IS THE GREATEST ALBUM THAT YOU DIDN'T LIKE AT FIRST — BUT NOW LOVE? *Led Zeppelin III*. I wasn't feeling the acoustic vibe at first after the heavy rock of their first two albums, but it's undoubtedly a classic.

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR GREATEST SUCCESS TO DATE? Staying alive. [*Laughs*] No, more than that — retaining my childishness.

WHAT IS YOUR BIGGEST REGRET? Waiting 65 years before I married my wife. [*Laughs*]

WHAT IS THE GREATEST LIVE BAND YOU'VE EVER SEEN? It's actually a toss-up between Judas Priest and Deep Purple. Priest on the tour where we supported them over here — the [1982] *Screaming for Vengeance* tour. God, they were outrageously good, you know? Absolutely peak stuff.

And then I remember seeing Purple when they got back together on [1984's] *Perfect Strangers*; we all went to see them, in fact. It was in Denmark, and we were all standing side stage, because we're all big Purple fans. I remember thinking [Ritchie] Blackmore was playing out of his skin that night: No mucking about, no stupidity, no nothing. God almighty, his guitar was just *on fire*. The whole band, really. And [producer] Martin Birch, bless him, who was obviously still very much alive at that point, we went back and I said, "God, Martin, we saw Purple the other night. Wow, they were good!" And Martin went, "Yeah, it's 'cause you were there." And I said, "What? Maiden?" He goes, "Yeah, they knew you were there, so they pulled out all the stops. They stopped pissing about and they did what they could do, to show you guys how it's done." And that's kind of cool, you know?

Oh, and the other one, believe it or not, was Kansas. I saw them in a half-empty theater, in Minneapolis. I had a day off, and I had an on-the-road romance, a girlfriend for a week. [*Laughs*] We spent most of the time in the hotel room, but I was just like, "Should we actually go *out* somewhere? Kansas are on — oh, let's

PETE STILL/REDFERNS

"Having a few experiences of sheer terror is good for later life, 'cause if you terrify yourself enough in your early years, you'll never be scared later on."
— Bruce Dickinson

go see fucking Kansas!" And so we went, and I was absolutely blown away by them. I was like, "God, these guys are fucking good!" And they were playing to a half-empty theater, you know; just no justice in the world.

WHAT IS THE MOST "ROCK STAR" THING YOU'VE EVER PURCHASED? A Fokker DR.I triplane, like the Red Baron flew in World War I.

WHAT IS THE MOST STARSTRUCK YOU'VE EVER BEEN? When I first met [Deep Purple singer] Ian Gillan. When I was in a band called Samson, we recorded our album at Ian's studio, and his bass player, John McCoy, was the producer of it. So at the end of the album, we'd all been upstairs in the pub, having a big celebration after listening back to the album a couple of times. We came back down from the pub and said, "Oh, let's listen to it one more time." And the engineer was passing around this joint. It wasn't like conventional hash; it was something called Temple Balls, which I think had opium or some other weird stuff in it. Anyway, this thing got passed around, and I took a few big heaves off it. And then, in the middle of all this, Ian walks in, with the full-on hair down to his waist. He sits down and goes, "Hey guys, yeah! So, good album? Let's have a listen!"

We were like, "Wow, it's *the man*." And of course at this point in my career I'm in full Ian Gillan imitation mode, screaming away all over the album like "AAAAAAAHHHH!!!" And he listens, and he goes, "Fucking cool screams there. Who's that?" I went, "Uhhhh... me!" And I suddenly wanted to be sick. I made a quick exit and spent the next 25 minutes with my head down the toilet. Finally, Ian kicks down the toilet door, I vomit on his shoes, and he puts me in a cab and sends me home. And every time I meet him, from that day to this, he reminds me of that night. [*Laughs*]

WHAT IS THE BEST SHOW YOU'VE EVER PLAYED? I think one of the shows — we just actually put the [vinyl] record out, *Beast Over Hammersmith* — from the [1982] *Number of the Beast* tour. We were on fire, you know; there should have been a video, but the lighting designer fucked up the lights and there wasn't enough light for the cameras. [*Laughs*] So that stayed in the can until now, but I think that's an absolute classic record. We may have done better shows; but for a testament, something I could go to that's recorded, it would be that for Maiden. But if I was to pick something from an emotional or moral perspective, I think playing a [solo 1994] gig in Sarajevo [Bosnia and Herzegovina] in the middle of the war is pretty hard to beat.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE WORST SHOW YOU'VE EVER PLAYED? God, there's been a few of those! [*Laughs*] A couple of the shows when we were coming towards the end of the [1984-85] *Powerslave* tour, we were all pretty fried. I think the agent had run out of places for us to play, so we played some weird places. We played this one gig in Charlevoix, Michigan, to people who were literally sitting on hay bales. And I was like, "What are we doing here?" You know what I mean? I think that's when I made up the lyrics to "22 Acacia Avenue" like, "That's the place we go to buy the cheese!" I tried to get in all kinds of things — "Cheddar! Wensleydale! Gorgonzola! Things always go better with cheese!"

WHAT'S BEEN YOUR MOST EMBARRASSING ONSTAGE MOMENT? Having my balls fall out in the middle of a video shoot in front of, uh, 4,000 Spanish people. [*Laughs*] We were doing a shoot for [my 1996 solo album] *Skunkworks*, I think it was for a live video. It was a two-day shoot; we were in the same place for two days, and I went back to the dressing room after the first day to find that some fucker had stolen my trousers. I had one pair of stage trousers, which are these like fake leathery looking things, and where the fuck am I going to get another pair of these trousers in Pamplona?

So we are wandering around, and I find a pair of these patent leather stretchy things, but they're for women and they're like three sizes too small. I squeak my way into them, and the director says, "Don't worry; we're doing long shots today, so it should be fine." So I'm singing away, and suddenly I feel a little draft — they've split, and both of my balls are hanging out from this split in my pants. I'm like, "You are fucking kidding me!" So we went off, and I sort of stuffed them back in, and we fixed the split with black gaffer tape. We gaffer taped over my balls, and I did the rest of the show. [*Laughs*]

WHO HAS BEEN THE TOUGHEST BAND TO OPEN FOR? Priest, because they were very good — but also because in some respects their organization was a pain in the arse to us, because obviously we were decent competition. But they definitely kept you on your toes; you had to be, 'cause they were good every night.

The other band that were particularly difficult to open for was a mixed bill we did with 38 Special and Rainbow [in 1982]. That was very difficult to deal with, because they were the co-headliners; we had like 25 minutes and then it was 38 Special and then Rainbow, and then they would alternate. They didn't get on, as you can imagine, and one night they argued so much about who should headline that they both refused to budge. So *we* headlined. [*Laughs*] By the time we ended up going on, they'd both gone home and the audience had all gone home. So we were like left with a couple of hundred people in the hall. But it was like, "Oh, well — here we go!"

WHAT HAS BEEN THE MOST TERRIFYING FLIGHT YOU'VE EVER PILOTED? Most times when you are terrified, it's usually because of ignorance, right? What you're terrified of is the unknown, so having a few experiences of sheer terror is good for later life, 'cause if you terrify yourself enough in your early years, you'll never be scared later on. [*Laughs*] When I was still a young sprog and I was literally learning to fly, my flight instructor had given me permission to fly solo from L.A. to Vegas and back over a weekend, 'cause I needed to get a bunch of cross-country hour time.

So I took off, and I didn't know that much about mountain flying and mountain winds and things like that. I'd just read a few textbooks and things, but it never really dawned on me until I ended up in mountain turbulence. I thought I was going to crash, because the airplane was going down and I could not control the rate of descent of the airplane. It didn't matter how much power I added, or anything. And then I got to the other side of the valley, drifted across, and all of a sudden it was like going up in an elevator; and now I could not control the airplane 'cause I was going in the updraft.

I was kinda like writing headlines for myself — "The Fool! He Imagined He Could Fly!" — and picturing a big, crumpled mess at the bottom of the valley. Then I slowly figured out what was happening, flew out of the Cajon Pass into the high desert, got to Vegas, sat myself down, had an omelet. As you do. [*Laughs*] I thought, Well, I've gotta fly back. But let's go back a different way and at a different altitude. Flew back, went and bought myself a book called *Mountain Flying* by a gentleman called Sparky Imeson, and I almost read it cover-to-cover in one night. I thought, Why the fuck did all that happen to me? And then, from reading the book, I discovered. So, knowledge is your friend.

I also had to shut an engine down halfway across the Atlantic in a light aircraft. I was ferrying an aircraft from Goose Bay to Greenland and then onto Iceland and everywhere else like that, and the "Engine Fire" light came on. I should have been terrified, but I wasn't. It was like, "OK, we just do what we're supposed to do, and see what happens." And luckily, it was all good. The more you get trained, the better you're able to handle these kinds of situations. I've got airplane stories up the yin-yang — but the time I was *properly* terrified was that time on my own through the Cajon Pass.

WHAT'S THE GREATEST DREAM – MUSICAL OR OTHERWISE – THAT YOU'VE YET TO ACHIEVE? I want to play several songs in concert with a full orchestra and a band, and one of them is "Empire of the Clouds" [from Iron Maiden's *The Book of Souls*] — with a *proper* pianist, not me. A proper pianist, a full orchestra, a choir and a band. And I'd like to extend it so it gets up to about 30 minutes, and maybe have a little visual thing with the screen, with some old footage of airships. And possibly have a small narration about what happened in the story to set it up so people would understand it. And then we could knock out "Jerusalem" and "Tears of the Dragon" — and a few other things that might sound great with an orchestra, as well. ®

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